A take on PART

The phraseology of a frequent noun in English

Elisabeth Maria Neuhaus

A thesis presented to the Department of Literature,

Area Studies and European Languages

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MA degree

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ABSTRACT

This study is an investigation of the very frequent noun PART, with primary focus on its use in three constructions: TAKE *part*, PLAY [*] *part*, and PLAY [*] [*] *part*. The theoretical framework for the study is rooted in John Sinclair's work on linguistic co-selection and extended units of meaning. It has also been influenced by Sinclair's and Stubbs' work on very frequent words and phrases, in particular Sinclair's article "A Way with Common Words" (1999).

The theoretical chapter gives a presentation of phraseology as a discipline, and its close ties to corpus linguistics. It goes on to present two of Sinclair's most famous models: his two principles for language production, the idiom principle and the open choice principle (1991), and his model for extended lexical units (1996 and 1998). There is also a section on the debate about units of meaning, and finally, a presentation of some previous investigations into frequent words in English.

In the analysis, lexical profiles of the different phrases with *part* are created and analysed. Some of the main findings are summed up below:

TAKE *part* almost exclusively occurs with subjects that have human referents. Obligatory situational context in most cases gives a specific meaning to the verb phrase, though the phrase in itself carries very little meaning.

PLAY [*] *part* is realised as three distinct types, two of which are phrasal. In contrast to TAKE *part*, the phrasal realisations of PLAY [*] *part* keeps a relatively vague meaning, even in context, which seems to be one of the reasons for its high frequency.

PLAY [*] [*] *part* exemplifies the underutilisation of grammatical options discussed in chapter 2; a single sequence, an expansion of PLAY *a part*, makes up 90 per cent of the sample.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

1 INTRODUCTION

> *Whereas much (Chomskyan) linguistics has been concerned with what speakers can say, corpus linguistics is also necessarily concerned with what speakers do say.*
> (Stubbs 2002: 61)

The completion of the first electronic corpus more than half a century ago started something of a revolution in linguistic research. With generative grammar about to reach the height of its popularity, a usage-based approach to language was anathema, but since then, corpus linguistics has "become a new research enterprise and a new philosophical approach to linguistic enquiry" (McEnery et al. 2006: 7–8). This new outlook on language has spawned a number of new disciplines, one of these being phraseology.

The present thesis is an investigation of the phraseology of a very frequent noun in English: PART. The study is rooted in the Neo-Firthian tradition, and particularly influenced by the work of John Sinclair (1991, 1996, 1998, 1999, *passim*) and Michael Stubbs (1995, 2004, 2009a, 2009b, forthcoming).

1.1 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The theoretical backdrop for this study is built on Sinclair's work on linguistic co-selection and extended units of meaning, and Sinclair's and Stubbs' work on very frequent words in English (chapter 2).

I will be studying the noun PART, with primary focus on its use in three very frequent constructions: TAKE *part*, PLAY [*] *part* and PLAY [*] [*] *part*.

In the introductory section of the analysis (sections 4.1–4.2), I will be asking the following questions:

(1) What are the primary collocations and colligations of PART?
(2) Do the singular *part* and the plural *parts* have the same phraseological tendencies?
(3) In which very frequent verb phrases does PART appear?

In the in-depth study of the three sequences (sections 4.3–4.6) , I will be addressing the following questions:

(4) What sort of surface variation do we find with PLAY [*] *part* and PLAY [*] [*] *part*? Do they represent one or several nodes (basic phrases)?
(5) What are the collocations and colligations of the three sequences? What are the similarities and differences between them?
(6) Do the sequences have detectable semantic preference or discourse prosody? How do the sequences differ in this respect?
(7) What part does *part* play in the frequent phrases?
(8) To what extent can *part* be considered a lexical word in the sequences?

My study is particularly influenced by Sinclair's article "A Way with Common Words" (1999). The study of the very frequent noun *way* shed light on the failings of the traditional distinction between 'lexical' and 'grammatical' words when they were applied to the most common words in English. It was found that *way* owed a great deal of its high frequency to its place in several high-frequency phrases, and that *way* in most cases retained little of its 'core' meaning in such phrases. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

Although I will not be following the same procedure as Sinclair, the basic premise is the same for my study: does the classical distinction between lexical and grammatical words hold up for the most frequent words, such as PART? And if not, how should we describe this very important part of the language? These questions challenge the assumption that the word is the basic unit of meaning in English, suggesting instead a phrase-based approach, with meaning defined by various factors of co-selection.

1.2 PLAN FOR THE STUDY

This thesis is organised into five chapters. Chapter 2 will outline the theoretical foundations of the study. I will discuss how the development of large-scale electronic corpora has influenced linguistic research, and how phraseology has evolved as a result. The chapter will also contain a discussion of the unit of meaning. Further on, I will introduce two of John Sinclair's most famous models of language: the two principles for

language production, and his model for extended lexical units. Finally, I will introduce some previous investigations of the phraseology of frequent words in English.

Chapter 3 will be a presentation of the methodological approach and the material forming the basis of the study. I will give a presentation of the British National Corpus (BNC), and detail the search strings used to extract data for the in-depth study. There will also be a section discussing the issues of validity and reliability that pertain to both research methods and material.

Chapter 4 will present findings from the analysis. I will first present PART (n) as a very frequent word in English, before narrowing down the analysis to three very frequent sequences containing the singular form *part*. I will analyse the various realisations of these sequences based on Sinclair's models, and compare and contrast their lexical profiles. Finally, I will discuss the role of *part* in the phrases, and whether or not the noun retains its status as a lexical word in very frequent phrases.

Chapter 5 will give a summary of the findings from chapter 4 in light of the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2. The final chapter will also provide suggestions for further research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Over the past 20–30 years, phraseology has experienced a rapid and major expansion, moving from the periphery to the centre of linguistic research. Today phraseology is considered a discipline in its own right, rooted in a number of different pre-existing frameworks such as cognitive linguistics, ESL studies and corpus linguistics. Phraseology currently faces the challenge of attempting to unify, or at least clarify, the mishmash of definitions, terminology and methodologies associated with it. One thing they all have in common: a belief that the long-held view of language production as a matter of selecting individual words from mental storage, and arranging them according to a set of grammatical rules, is an inadequate account of how we speak and write.

In this section, I will present some of the background for the shift towards a chunk-based approach to linguistics, and go on to present John Sinclair's models for language production and units of meaning. I will also present some previous investigations of the phraseology of frequent words.

2.1 CORPUS LINGUISTICS AND PHRASEOLOGY

> *[T]he language looks rather different when you look at a lot of it at once.*
> (Sinclair 1991: 100).

Using collections of authentic texts for linguistic research has had a place in linguistics since long before the computer was an available tool. The term "corpus" is used when such collections are consciously created to be a snapshot of language at a given place and time, where one can study linguistic phenomena in a large, but finite set of data. With the development of computer technology, corpora became electronic, and with that, automatically searchable.

Since the Brown corpus was created in 1961, corpora have come a long way, improving in both size and quality. The Internet revolution of the 1990s had the further effect of making them more readily accessible, and a number of the larger corpora (e.g. the Corpus of Contemporary American and the British National Corpus) are now web-based. Today we have access to hundreds of corpora chronicling the language of different times, places, peoples and cultures.

The most important benefit of computer-assisted linguistic analysis is the ability to look at a lot of data at once, and from new angles. Large corpora give a better representation of the diversity and dynamic nature of language than introspective methods could ever hope to do. To use a modern analogy, the human mind can be equated to Google Street View, but a searchable, computer-based corpus is like having access to Google Earth. The combined abilities of a computer and a human brain allow us to see language in a more revealing light. With data presented in concordance lines, we can spot recurring patterns and tendencies that otherwise would have gone unnoticed. Corpora can also provide frequency information, both of occurrence and co-occurrence. To quote Gries (2008:16): "From this, it is a relatively small conceptual leap to the […] definition of phraseologisms as a co-occurrence phenomenon."

2.2 PAWLEY AND SYDER: THE LEXICAL PHRASE

> *Speakers do at least as much remembering as they do putting together.*
> (Bolinger 1976, quoted in Erman and Warren 2000)

The traditional "slot-and-filler" model was criticised as early as in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but Andrew Pawley and his mother, Frances Hodgetts Syder, get a lot of credit for sparking a growing interest in formulaic language from the 1980s onwards. Their article, "Two puzzles for linguistic theory: nativelike selection and nativelike fluency" (1983), brings up issues of idiomaticity versus grammaticality in an academic environment that had largely taken the generative approach for granted. The popularly held opinion had for some time been that learning a language was for the most part a question of learning the set of rules that generated grammatical sentences, and being able to tell ungrammatical sentences from grammatical ones (ibid: 192–3).[1] Pawley and Syder point out that, while there exist rules governing whether or not a piece of language is grammatical, native speakers do not make use of anywhere near the full range of possibilities:

> *The problem we are addressing is that native speakers do not exercise the creative potential of syntactic rules to anything like their full extent, and that, indeed, if they did do so they*

[1] Generativists viewed phrases largely as anomalies, compartmentalised in a separate part of the lexicon (cf. Gries 2008: 10).

> *would not be accepted as exhibiting nativelike control of the language. The fact is that only a small proportion of the total set of grammatical sentences are nativelike in form — in the sense of being readily acceptable to native informants as ordinary, natural forms of expression, in contrast to expressions that are grammatical but are judged to be 'unidiomatic', 'odd' or 'foreignisms'.* (ibid: 193)

The authors continue by separating correctness/grammaticality from fluency/idiomaticity, and explain the difficulties of teaching students what they call "nativelike" selection and fluency. In order to speak idiomatically, one must not only be able to separate the grammatical from the ungrammatical, but also the idiomatic from the unidiomatic (unnatural or "highly marked" wordings). This latter distinction is neither rule-governed, nor was it a well-researched issue at the time—hence the title, "puzzles for linguistic theory".

Pawley and Syder distinguish between two aspects of linguistic competence: "nativelike selection", i.e. the ability to select idiomatic and natural sentences from all the grammatical possibilities, and "nativelike fluency", the ability to produce fluent stretches of spontaneous connected speech. They point out that the learners who have been immersed in a native speaker community at some point will have less trouble masking their foreignness than those who have learned the language from books and grammars alone (ibid: 194–5).[2]

It is suggested that native speakers have access to a set of what they call "lexicalised sentence stems", (semi-) prefabricated items that are stored in the mental lexicon as easily retrievable units, both as a result of and as a reason for their regular usage. They do not have to have non-compositional meaning, nor do they have to be entirely fixed; in fact, Pawley and Syder do not suggest any syntactic or semantic criteria for the units, beyond that they be "a conventional label for a conventional concept, a culturally standardised designation (term) for a socially recognised conceptual category" (ibid: 209). Investigation of these standardised pairings of meaning and form is still a major concern for researchers today, forming the basis of phraseology, as well as other pattern-based approaches to language.

[2] This is a central point when it comes to design and annotation of electronic corpora, which I will return to later on. Pawley and Syder contrast the abilities of human learners and man-made computers on pp. 217–8.

2.3 THE IDIOM PRINCIPLE AND THE OPEN CHOICE PRINCIPLE

> *If something like the co-occurrence of two or more words is statistically significant, this tells me that there is but a small chance of it being accidental. But I don't expect it to be accidental anyway.* (Sinclair in Teubert 2004: xxvii)

Decades of work on major corpus-based projects like the OSTI Report and the COBUILD project left Sinclair convinced that no single principle would ever be sufficient to explain how language was produced, organised and interpreted. In *Looking up: An account of the COBUILD project in lexical computing* (1987), he introduces two principles for language production: the idiom principle and the open-choice principle. The principles are elaborated on in *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation* (1991).

The open-choice principle is a segmental approach closely resembling the 'slot-and-filler' model that most traditional grammars are based on. The principle assumes that almost all positions in an utterance offers a choice, and individual words are selected freely from the lexicon and inserted in these slots. If all language were produced this way, every utterance would require a complex pattern of choices, but the building blocks themselves would be relatively primitive (ibid. 109).

Sinclair proposes that the primary mode of normal language production is the idiom principle. This principle is based on the assumption that speakers have access to a lexicon of not only individual words, but also to a great deal of "semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices" (ibid. 110). According to this principle, one can call upon a frequently used complex unit, e.g. the greeting *how do you do*, in a single operation, as it is stored as one lexicalised whole (along with any semantic and syntactic rules applying to it). The words *how*, *do* and *you* are also stored individually in the alongside the prefabs, which enables creative language use in addition to swift and efficient recall of common word combinations. The idiom principle reminds us of Pawley and Syder's findings; that prefabricated lexicalised sentence stems (or, as Pawley has later dubbed them, 'productive speech formulas'), each with their own 'mini-grammar', are a central part of nativelike language production (2007: 20). The idiom principle could go a long way in explaining why many word combinations recur very frequently, whereas other, equally grammatical combinations do not occur at all.

"Idiom principle" is perhaps a slightly misleading name: the prefabs in question are seldom idioms. Sinclair uses *of course* as an example of a prefab, explaining how both words seem to be chosen simultaneously, and operate as if they were a single word. The unit has non-compositional meaning, and does not abide by normal grammatical rules (1991: 110–111). Sinclair points out that many prefabricated phrases allow internal variation in syntax, lexis and word order; they can be discontinuous, and have an indeterminate extent, often due to collocational attraction between either the phrase itself, or words in it, and other words. It is also noted that many phrases have a tendency to co-occur with certain grammatical or semantic choices (ibid. 111-112). These latter points would later form the basis of Sinclair's model for extended units of meaning (1996 and 1998, see discussion in section 2.5).

Erman and Warren investigated Sinclair's model in their 2000 article, "The idiom and open choice principles". Their aim was to find out more about the process of alternating between the two principles in stretches of real text, and what impact prefabs have on the structure and interpretation of spoken and written language (ibid. 30).

Their findings showed that, though all the texts they studied contained evidence of both models, an average of 55 per cent of a text was interpretable by the idiom principle (ibid. 37). They found that there was a slightly higher proportion of prefabs in spoken than in written language (59 and 52 per cent, respectively), and also that different types of prefabs, and different combination patterns, occurred in spoken and written text. 'Lexical prefabs' were the most frequent overall, the smaller, but the functional categories of 'grammatical' (proforms, quantifiers, determiners, etc.), 'pragmatic' (discourse markers, hedges, etc.) and 'reducible' prefabs (contracted forms like *I'm, hasn't, let's*, etc.) were much more prevalent in spoken text. Moreover, prefabs were found to be quite short: lexical prefabs were slightly longer than their functional counterparts (2–5 words, on average 3), whereas functional ones tended to only be 2–3 words in length. The findings support Sinclair's claim that the lexicon contains words and phrases side by side, and that a great deal of language is produced by making fewer choices of complex items, rather than many complex choices of simple items (ibid. 49).

2.4 DEFINING THE OBJECT: UNITS OF MEANING

> *It is an odd failing of linguistics that it has no convincing descriptive theory of units of meaning.* (Stubbs 2002: 62)

Traditionally, language has been analysed as a system of hierarchies, axes and dichotomies. Words have been viewed as the basic unit of meaning, and a "slot and filler" model has come to dominate our linguistic expectations. Words have been divided into "meaning words" (lexical words) and "function words" (grammatical words):

> *Lexical words (nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives, adverbs) carry information*
> *Grammatical words (modal verbs, prepositions, pronouns, co-ordinators, conjunctions, articles) help us interpret the meaning of sentences by indicating the relationships between the lexical words*
> (Longman Student Grammar, Biber et al. 2002: 15–16)

Phrases are overlooked in this distinction, but language consists of a large number of recurring constructions, as we saw in section 2.3. In traditional dictionaries and grammars, phrasal and prepositional verbs will typically be accounted for in sections of their own, and idioms are treated as an anomaly (which, in all fairness, they are). Other fixed and semi-fixed expressions are broken down into their lexical and grammatical components, even when their meaning is more (or occasionally less) than the sum of these parts. Studies of phraseology have indicated that this dichotomy, neat and logical though it may be, leaves much to be desired when it comes to interpreting a lot of normal speech and writing. It is a case of the facts conflicting with the theory.

There is a terminological disparity within linguistics in general, and phraseology in particular. There is little agreement over what constitutes a word, a phrase, or a unit of meaning. Some definitions are relatively standardised within communities, but a lot of the time, the linguist researching units of meaning defines his or her parameters according to what is convenient for the study at hand, thus adding to the myriad definitions already found in literature. From a scientific point of view, this can be unfortunate, as it reduces the comparability and replicability of each study, especially if the defining criteria are not very clearly stated.

Within the different linguistic disciplines, there are some terms that have gained more ground than others. Wray's "formulaic sequences" (2002 and *passim*) have been used among psycholinguists and EFL/ESL researchers. Sinclair proposed "extended lexical units" (1996, 1998), Biber at al. (2002) talk about "chunks" and "lexical bundles", and Sinclair and Renouf (1991) also proposed "phrase frames" as a term for typically discontinuous sequences of grammatical words. Computers understand "n-grams", which are identical strings of 'n' number of words, and do not take into account any surface variation at all. Many linguists simply default to "phrase", but with individual definitions of what a phrase is.

Though there is no doubt that words have had a strong standing as the primary units of linguistic meaning, there is a growing consensus in some academic circles (e.g. linguists in the Neo-Firthian tradition) that the phrase, the co-selected, multi-word, slightly variable unit, would be better suited to this title.

2.5 A MODEL FOR EXTENDED UNITS OF MEANING

> *"You shall know a word by the company it keeps!"* (Firth 1957: 11)

In articles published in the mid to late 1990s, notably "The search for units of meaning" (1996) and "The lexical item" (1998), Sinclair continues to challenge the assumption that the word is the basic unit of meaning. He makes the case for what he calls extended lexical units, or compound lexical items, based on the strong tendencies for words, grammatical categories, meanings and attitudes to co-occur in predictable, self-perpetuating patterns (2004 [1996]: 39).

Sinclair's proposals were further developed by Michael Stubbs in *Words and Phrases* (2002), where they were formalised as a Model for Extended Lexical Units. The model lists four increasingly abstract relations of co-occurrence: collocation, colligation, semantic preference, and semantic prosody or discourse prosody.

Table 1: The parameters of an extended unit of meaning [3]

RELATION	Constituent	Example core/node: '*naked eye*'
1. COLLOCATION	Co-occurring word-forms or lemmas	[*with/to*] *the naked eye*
2. COLLIGATION	Co-occurring grammatical categories	PREP *the naked eye*
3. SEMANTIC PREFERENCE	Propositional content. Co-occurrence with semantically related word-forms or lemmas	Word or phrase to do with visibility
4. DISCOURSE PROSODY	Evaluation, communicative purpose, speaker attitude	Difficulty (shown by words such as *small, faint, difficult* modifying visibility)

2.5.1 COLLOCATION

Collocation is the habitual co-occurrence of word forms or lemmas, a phenomenon that has been acknowledged by linguists for more than a century (Wray 2008: 2). Major studies on collocation were published by Palmer (1933) and Firth (1957), each with different working definitions of what 'collocation' was; Palmer focussed largely on recurring patterns, whereas Firth concentrated on how the meaning of individual words is influenced by the words it tends to occur with (Lindquist 2009: 72). Inspired by Firth, Halliday and Sinclair published on collocation throughout the 1960s, and the OSTI Report on collocations in English, for which Sinclair was Principal Investigator and editor, came in 1970 (Sinclair et al. 2004).

Collocations are generally defined as the more-frequent-than-average co-occurrence of word forms or lemmas within a certain collocational span. This span is usually defined

[3] Based on Sinclair 1996 and 1998. Model formalised by Stubbs 2002. Example ('naked eye') from Sinclair 1996. Some table content from Ebeling and Ebeling (forthcoming).

as no more than five words left or right of the node (the word that is being studied), but studies have shown that almost all significant collocations can be found within a nine-word span, i.e. four positions on either side of the node (cf. Jones and Sinclair 1974).

Sinclair distinguishes between upward and downward collocation, by which he is referring to word frequencies. Downward collocation happens when the collocate is a less frequent word than the node. If the node is *part* (sg.), and the collocate is *integral*, we have downward collocation, because *part* is a much more frequent word. The opposite would be the case if we were studying *integral*, which has upward collocation with *part*. Sinclair points out that upward collocation is statistically the weaker of the two, and that the words are often part of grammatical frames (1991: 116). Downward collocation gives "a semantic analysis of a word", saying something about its semantic preference and prosody (ibid.). Collocates with approximately the same frequency as the node are termed neutral collocates.

Evidence points toward collocation being an indicator of the phraseological tendencies of a word; most collocates only occur in one or two basic patterns, though there may be superficial variation (ibid. 121). This means that collocations will also be a window into colligation.

2.5.2 COLLIGATION

Colligation is more frequent than expected co-occurrence between a node and certain grammatical categories, e.g. 'verb', 'prepositional phrase' or 'conjunction'. We see in table 1 that Sinclair's example *naked eye* colligates with prepositions, and collocates specifically with *with* and *to*—collocation and colligation are interrelated in this way. If a node collocates with several members from the same grammatical class, or very frequently with one or two members of such a class, both collocation and colligation are observed.

Colligation can occur both left and right of the node. In the case of *naked eye*, there are stronger pattern-forming tendencies to the left of the node. We will see in chapter 4 that *part* co-occurs with specific grammatical elements on both sides.

2.5.3 SEMANTIC PREFERENCE

Semantic preference is frequent co-occurrence between the node and a group of semantically related words, or a lexical field. In the case of *naked eye*, the semantic field is 'visibility', i.e. the phrase is used in connection with this semantic field, whether it is the topic of the whole text or a metaphor in a sentence. Semantic preference is often more difficult to detect than the two previous parameters, because it is not directly observable, and not all phrases display their semantic preference in a neat and tidy way, or as one single 'theme'—preference must be deduced by the linguist. Preference is just as much a feature of language production as it is of language interpretation. Sinclair states that the largest and 'outermost' units are chosen first, meaning that semantic preference is the second choice after discourse prosody (Tognini-Bonelli 2001: 105).

2.5.4 DISCOURSE PROSODY

Discourse prosody, also called semantic prosody or evaluative prosody, is the most abstract, and least observable of the four co-occurrence factors. Prosody says something about speaker attitude. It is often related to semantic preference; if a word frequently occurs with words from a lexical field with a particularly negative charge, e.g. 'natural disasters' or 'illnesses', the phrase is likely to have negative prosody, and vice versa. In the case of *naked eye*, the discourse prosody is 'difficulty', pertaining to the 'visibility' aspect that is the semantic preference. Some nodes have a very distinct semantic prosody, but many are prosody neutral, i.e. do not add an evaluative or attitudinal sense to the utterance.

2.6 VERY FREQUENT WORDS

2.6.1 SINCLAIR: A WAY WITH COMMON WORDS

"A Way with Common Words" (Sinclair 1999) discusses the accuracy and applicability of the conventional distinction between lexical words and grammatical words. Specifically, it touches on how many high-frequency words do not seem to fall into these categories, but have a specific set of traits that crosses the boundaries between lexical and

grammatical. Sinclair also challenges the notion of word classes in general, and states the following:

> *An alternative hypothesis [to placing frequent words in the large word classes] is that many of the commoner words do not belong to the large word classes, but each word is in a word class of its own; sharing perhaps some of the defining features of one or more classes, but showing either unique usage patterns or a unique combination of them.* (ibid: 166)

Sinclair chooses to look at the lemma WAY, a word that is squarely in the "lexical" category, but has a high frequency. The study does a lot to illustrate that the nature of frequent words is twofold; common words can be common without having to be frequently selected individually, i.e. through open choice. Some words appear in a number of more or less fixed constructions, and owe their frequency to their strong collocational/phrase-forming tendencies. Research indicates that this is the case for many common nouns; it is rare that they are frequent entirely on their own merit (Sinclair 1999, Stubbs in Hoey et al. 2007). This, then, raises the question of how frequency really ought to be measured, and how English can most effectively be taught.

Sinclair reached the following conclusions in his study:

- *Way* appears many times in a very limited number of phrases, so its high frequency can in part be ascribed to the fact that these phrases are frequent. The speaker often choses the phrase containing *way*, and not the individual word itself, when she is constructing her sentence.
- *Way* has different meanings and functions in these phrases—meanings it does not have when selected through open choice.
- *Way* is falsely classified as a lexical word, because it does not seem to have a central or core meaning, but it carries different semantic content according to the phrases in which is appears—as such, it seems to function more like a grammatical word. And if a noun like *way* is not lexical, perhaps the cut-and-dry distinction between grammatical and lexical words needs to be revised, even abandoned?

This article sparked research into other frequent words, and the studies that followed confirm a lot of what Sinclair wanted to say with this piece. Stig Johansson (2004)

researched the common phrases Sinclair found in a contrastive perspective (Norwegian-English).

2.6.2 Lindquist and Levin: foot and mouth

Lindquist and Levin have taken on many frequent nouns, specifically body part nouns, to investigate how they are used in phrases. In "*Foot* and *mouth*: The phrasal patterns of two frequent nouns" (2008), they extract data using methods developed by corpus linguists, namely Stubbs' "from lexis to n-grams" technique, while examining the material through the lens of cognitive linguistics. The meaning of familiar body part words is extended in order to describe other equally familiar, but often abstract, sentiments or concepts, such as emotions, experiences, etc. They find that more than half of the occurrences of *foot*/*feet* and *mouth*(*s*) are found in more or less conventionalised phrases, and that very many of these phrases used the body parts as a creative, non-literal way of explaining familiar events and concepts. Lindquist and Levin find that people do not, in fact, spend as much time discussing their bodies as it would appear from a word frequency ranking, but these words are very much used as a way of talking about other things, typically in fixed phrases and expressions. It is not so much the case that the individual words "foot" or "mouth" have potentially non-literal meanings, as phrases containing them *only* having non-literal meanings: being "down in the mouth" makes no sense when interpreted literally, and "cold feet" can typically not be cured with thick socks. This formulaic use more than doubles the frequencies of both FOOT and MOUTH, thus proving Sinclair and Stubbs right: in these cases, frequent words are frequent in part because they appear in frequent phrases, and have strong constructional tendencies.

3 METHOD AND MATERIAL

3.1 CORPUS LINGUISTICS

Despite having been discussed at some length in the previous chapter, corpus linguistics is not a theoretical domain, but essentially a "methodological basis for pursuing linguistic research", easily combinable with other branches of linguistics (Leech 1992: 105). Reduced to its bare bones, it is a quantitative approach; corpora alone can only ever provide frequency information, which in and of itself is of limited interest. The sensible corpus linguist will use these data as a starting point for qualitative research questions, and it is only through asking such questions that statistics potentially become meaningful (Aarts 2000: 8–9). Aarts uses an analogy of birth rates: pure frequency information can tell us that 445 children were born in one district of London one month, and the same month only 233 children were born in another district. This information is not particularly meaningful until you ask questions about why this is happening.

The theoretical and methodological framework upon which this study is based has come about through qualitative and quantitative studies of corpus material. An investigation such as this one, which looks at frequency, usage patterns and co-occurrence requires calculations and concordances that only an electronic corpus can efficiently produce. Rooting my research in corpus data was thus a natural choice for the present project.

3.2 MATERIAL

3.2.1 THE CORPUS

The data forming the basis for the investigation are from the British National Corpus (BNC). The BNC is a 100-million-word corpus of modern British English, with a written language section (approx. 90 million words) and a spoken language section (approx. 10 million words).

The BNC is a sample corpus, which means it contains extracts from texts rather than full texts. The material for the corpus was gathered in the early 1990s, and contains material from 1960–1993 (most of it from 1974–1993). It is a synchronic corpus, intended to represent language at a particular point in time (late 20th century British English), rather

than to demonstrate linguistic change. It is a general corpus, containing texts from a broad range of genres, speaker ages, education levels, etc., rather than specialising on one particular medium, genre or speaker type. The corpus is static, meaning that no new material has been added to it since it was completed in 1993.

The corpus has been annotated with part-of-speech-tags (POS-tags), but like most corpora of its size, it has not been grammatically parsed. Each text in the corpus has been tagged according to a number of metatextual categories, like genre and age of speaker.

The corpus was accessed through the online interface *BNCweb* (CQP edition, Hoffmann et al.). Some preparation work was done with the help of William Fletcher's online tool, Phrases In English (PIE), which searches the BNC especially for recurrent continuous and discontinuous strings (n-grams and p-frames). PIE was in the end not used for any part of the main analysis.

3.2.2 SEARCHES AND DATA SELECTION

The frequency information discussed in section 4.3 is based directly on the information on the lemma PART (n), accessed via the automatically generated frequency list on *BNCweb*. The tables of collocations with *part* and *parts* are also based on such a list. The section is intended to give a general overview, so though this is a less than thorough way of doing things, a few tagging errors here and there would not have any significant effect on the results, generally comprised of words that occurred in their hundreds, if not thousands.

When it came to extracting data for the in-depth analysis, I was looking for the most common sequences of PLAY and TAKE collocating with *part*. The most frequent position of TAKE as collocate is in position -1, i.e. immediately to the left of *part*. In the case of PLAY, the verb most often occurs in position -2 or -3, leaving either one or two slots open. I retrieved the data using the following search strings:

- {take/V} part_N* (3127 hits)
- {play/V} + part_N* (1112 hits)
- {play/V} + + part_N* (1192 hits)

These searches retrieve all realisations of the verb lemmas TAKE or PLAY, and all instances of the word form *part* tagged as a noun. The wildcard '+' stands for 'one or more arbitrary characters', so will each retrieve one w-unit (Hoffmann et al. 2008: 98).

In order to get a more manageable amount of data, I used *BNCweb*'s 'Thin' function to download 500 randomly selected s-units from each search result. I used the 'not reproducible random' option, so as to avoid sampling bias. I included metatextual information about text type, genre, domain, publication date, etc. I uploaded the data into Microsoft Excel for Mac 2011, after which I manually scouted for tagging errors and irrelevant results.

3.2.3 THE SAMPLES

TAKE *PART*

Of the 500 sampled occurrences, 498 are the familiar sequence 'to take part [in sth.]'—a precision of 99.6 per cent.

(1) In 1990 a group of children **took part** in 'Operation Lifestyle' — a scheme organised by the Humberside police to involve young people in worthwhile activities during the summer. (C93 1852)

Only two of the s-units have the words next to each other without them forming this phrase—instead, in both cases, TAKE and *part* belong to two separate, but adjacent syntactic units, like in the following example:

(2) Concretely, Erades's and Wood's characterization of the bare infinitive structure as evoking the helper as **taking part** of the work upon himself is too restrictive. (HXG 197)

In example (2), we see that *taking* acts as a lexical verb, followed by the phrase *part of the work*, which functions as its direct object. The final sample thus consists of 498 s-units.

PLAY [*] *PART*

In this 500-s-unit sample, there is only one sequence of PLAY [*] *part* where PLAY and *part* occur in obviously separate syntactic units. This gives a precision of 99.8 per cent.

The only irrelevant example is one where *played* is an independent lexical verb and *in part* is an adjacent unit (3):

(3) The takeover game was **played in part** with junk bonds, the very instruments Comdisco had earlier used to raise considerable capital of its own. (CPG 76)

To an even greater extent than TAKE and *part*, PLAY and *part* do not tend to occur together by coincidence. The final sample of PLAY [*] *part* thus consists of 499 s-units.

PLAY [*] [*] *PART*

Here we have not one, but two open slots, so there is quite literally more room for error. It is not surprising that the precision of the search is slightly lower; six out of 500 sentences (1.2 per cent) are non-phrasal co-occurrences. One of the six ended up in the dataset due to a tagging quirk, the other five have PLAY in -2 position without entering into the same unit as *part*:

(4) He didn't want to **play** the game **part** time. (FSF 3686)

The final sample of PLAY [*] [*] *part* consists of 494 s-units.

3.2.4 SPECIFICATION OF VARIABLES

In preparation for the analysis, I went through the three final samples and categorised all 1491 s-units according to relevant variables. My aim was to create a lexical profile for the various sequences (or their various realisations, in the case of the two discontinuous sequences), following Sinclair's model for extended lexical units (cf. Sinclair 1996 and 1998, Stubbs 2002). I used the following categories:

Subject: All three samples had a column containing the subject of TAKE or PLAY

Subject type: Subjects were grouped by type of referent, e.g. 'Human' or 'Abstract'. As we will see, some samples showed easily definable categories of subject, others less so.

Prepositional complement (PC): This was applicable to all sentences where *part* was directly followed by an *in*-headed prepositional phrase (the most common sentence structure in all three samples).

Where there is no such phrase, the ellipted information is usually present elsewhere in the s-unit, or in previous text. I have gone through these instances and found the ellipted information, which has been categorised in a separate column.

Prepositional complement type: As was the case with subjects, this categorisation was not always straightforward, and it has not been done in the same way for all samples. In the sample for TAKE *part*, PCs have been grouped according to semantic properties ('event', 'group', etc.). In the other two samples, PCs have been grouped primarily by formal criteria ('*-ing* participle', 'ellipsis', etc), and then more informally categorised by meaning, because there were no clear distinctions like there were with TAKE *part*.

For each sample, I created a Pivot table in Excel, in order to efficiently produce frequency distributions and cross tabulations.

Insert type: The words in the open slots in PLAY [*] *part* and PLAY [*] [*] *part* were categorised according to word class and type (e.g. 'definite article' or 'possessive determiner'). The adjectives that frequently occurred in PLAY [*] [*] *part* were also categorised by meaning ('degree adjectives' and 'descriptive adjectives').

3.3 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

3.3.1 ISSUES WITH THE METHOD

With all automated text analysis, problems of precision and recall will loom over proceedings. Both are measures of retrieval effectiveness, and while they do not have to be mutually exclusive, perfect recall often means low precision, and vice versa (cf. Ball 1994). The ever-present 'recall problem' is this: in order to find out about a linguistic phenomenon using corpus data, you have to perform a search based on the knowledge you already have about its potential manifestations. Very precise search strings mean you only ever find what you are looking for, and you may be missing out on realisations of the phenomenon that you were unaware of or had forgotten about. In order to find all the relevant results in a corpus, you are likely to have to sift through very many irrelevant results.

By taking as my starting point something defined solely by formal criteria—two words in a predefined positional relationship—the recall problem is greatly diminished. There is only so much that can go wrong. Tagging errors in the corpus (1–2 per cent, according to

Hoffman et al. 2008) may for instance cause some instances of either PLAY or TAKE to not be picked up by the search, if they were wrongly tagged as non-verbs.[4] The precision of my searches has been found to be quite high (>98.8 per cent).

The final issue is with the sample does not affect this study in itself. The use of the 'non-reproducible random' means the study will not be exactly replicable. However, as the sample is representative of a static corpus, the findings themselves should be reproducible.

3.3.2 ISSUES WITH THE MATERIAL

The BNC is intended to be a balanced reference corpus of late 20th century British English. Some may argue that fifty-year-old text does not represent 'present-day English'. However, the overwhelming majority of samples are from 1985–93, and Hoffmann et al. (2008: 45) argue that the label 'modern English' is still generally applicable, despite there having been language change (new vocabulary, new text types, etc.) in the past twenty years. The object of my investigation is frequent phrases that are less likely to have been subject to significant change in such a short time, so this is not an important issue.

As was mentioned in 3.2.1, the texts in the corpus have been categorised according to a number of metatextual criteria, but particularly in the case of some of the more peripheral features (e.g. social class or first language of speaker), the information is unavailable for a lot of texts (Hoffmann et al. 2008: 36). Due to the limited quality and value of incomplete information, I have only used these categorisations as background variables, not as a central part of the analysis.

Finally, there is the issue of bias. Though the BNC is a much-used, trusted corpus, representativeness is difficult to ensure and impossible to gauge for. The spoken part of the corpus only makes up ten per cent of it, even though spoken conversation is undoubtedly the most common type of language, and some new text types (e-mails, tweets, online forum postings) are not or barely represented, whereas newspapers and periodical publications make up a large chunk of the written section. Is it representative of modern-day English that *Thatcher* (capitalised) has about the same frequency as

[4] A quick check reveals that all three search strings give the same results if 'part_N*' is replaced by 'part', meaning there are no wrongly tagged instances of *part* that are excluded by this POS-tag specification.

arrival, *bird*? Hoffman et al. (2008: 15–18) discuss this issue in some depth, but the bottom line seems to be that, there will always be issues with documenting something as dynamic and changeable as language, and one should always remain aware of the limitations of the corpus. At some point you must simply decide to trust your corpus.

3.4 SOME DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

Normalised frequency: All frequencies are occurrences per million words, unless otherwise specified.

Phrase: This will be used as a general term for the various realisations of the three sequences studied, meaning "recurring chunks".

Node: The 'core', the most basic form of a phrase or an extended lexical unit.

Abbreviations: prepositional complement (PC), noun phrase (NP), prepositional phrase (PP), adjective (adj.), determiner (det.), definite (def.), indefinite (indef.).

4 EXTENDED VERBAL UNITS WITH *PART*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will be centred on the very frequent noun PART. I will first give a general overview of its usage, collocations, primary syntactic patterns and distribution, based on data from the British National Corpus (BNC). The in-depth analysis will focus on three frequent patterns in which the singular form *part* occurs: TAKE *part*, PLAY [*] *part* and PLAY [*] [*] *part*.

The primary objective is to learn more about how the "core" noun *part* contributes to meaning in these extended units, and to compare and contrast the lexical profiles of the three phrases in terms of syntactic environment, semantic preference, discourse prosody, and how the three behave as units of meaning. There will be a separate discussion as to whether or not PLAY [*] [*] *part* is an extended form of the basic form PLAY [*] *part.* Finally, I will be debating whether or not, based on the findings, *part* ought to be considered to belong to one of the established word classes, or if it, as Sinclair suggests may be the case for very frequent words, forms a sort of 'word class of its own' (1999: 166).

Both TAKE *part* and PLAY [*] *part* will be investigated thoroughly, more or less 'from scratch'. As I will already have performed an in-depth analysis of PLAY [*] *part*, I will be structuring the final section on PLAY [*] [*] *part* differently. Instead of starting from scratch on a phrase that is likely to bear strong resemblance to PLAY [*] *part*, I will be focussing on differences and similarities between the two phrases with PLAY, in the light of the findings from the former.

4.2 PART: FACTS AND FIGURES

4.2.1 FREQUENCY

PART is the 139th most frequent lemma in the British National Corpus (the 10th most frequent noun), appearing a total of 64,455 times, which gives a normalised frequency of

655.61 per million words. The individual forms, *part* and *parts*, have very different frequencies, which we will return to in section 4.2.3.

4.2.2 DEFINITIONS

As is typical for very frequent words, dictionaries devote many column inches to the various definitions of PART (n). Lexicographers' traditional approach to words assumes that words are by nature ambiguous, but that each word has a primary/core meaning that can be identified independently of co- or context. Fixed phrases and idioms are treated as anomalies, and the word's meaning in these environments as secondary to the independent 'core' meaning (Sinclair 1999: 158).

Let us see how the traditional approach manifests itself in the case of PART (n). In the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (*COED*, 2006), the definitions of the noun are listed as follows:[5]

- A piece or segment of something which combined with others makes up a whole. A component of a machine […]. A division of a book, periodical, or a broadcast serial. A measure allowing comparison between the amounts of different ingredients used in a mixture […].
- Some but not all of something — parts: region (informal).
- A role played by an actor or actress. Music: a melody or other constituent of harmony assigned to a particular voice or instrument.
- The contribution made by someone to an action or situation.
- Parts: abilities (archaic).
- A parting in the hair (Am. Eng.).

In addition, the *COED* lists and defines the following phrases and special uses:

- be part and parcel of
- for my/his/her part
- in part
- look the part

[5] The definitions have been slightly simplified, but no wording has otherwise been changed.

- a man of (many) parts
- on the part of (someone)/on [poss. det.] part
- take part
- take the part of

It is easy to see that a frequent noun such as PART has a number of uses and meanings, and that looking it up in a dictionary may in some cases be as confusing as it is clarifying.

4.2.3 DISTRIBUTION OF PART IN THE BNC

Table 2: Frequency of PART (lemma) in the BNC

Category	*# of hits*	*Dispersion/total files*	*Normalised frequency*
Written section	60,042	2,948/3,140	683.05
Spoken section	4,413	657/908	423.93
Total	*64,455*	*3,605/4,048*	*655.61*

Table 3: Frequency of *part* (sg.) in the BNC

Category	*# of hits*	*Dispersion/total files*	*Normalised frequency*
Written section	49,217	2,917/3,140	559.9
Spoken section	3,763	644/908	361.48
Total	*52,980*	*3,561/4,048*	*538.89*

Table 4: Frequency of *parts* (pl.) in the BNC

Category	*# of hits*	*Dispersion/total files*	*Normalised frequency*
Written section	10,825	2,195/3,140	123.15
Spoken section	651	281/908	62.44
Total	*11,475*	*2,476 /4,048*	*116.72*

The singular *part* is significantly more frequent than the plural form, *parts*, with overall frequencies of 538.89 and 116.72, respectively. Both forms are noticeably more frequent

in written texts than in spoken, but the difference is more marked in the case of the plural form, which occurs twice as often in writing than in speech. The singular form is about 50 per cent more frequent in writing than in speech.

If we look at dispersion between texts (table 2), PART occurs at least once in 89 per cent of all texts in the corpus. For the individual forms, frequencies range from *part*, which we find in 93 per cent of all written texts in the corpus, while at the other end of the scale, we find *parts* in less than one in three spoken texts (*part* occurs in twice as many spoken texts). We see that *part* has both higher overall frequencies and wider distribution than its plural counterpart.

There is also significant variation if we break the numbers down further, by text type; both the singular and plural form occur five times as often in texts listed as "academic prose" as in "spoken conversation":

Table 5: Distribution of *part* and *parts* across text types in the BNC

Derived text type	*Part*	*Parts*	*Total*
Academic prose	755.04	174.23	929.27
Unpublished written material	706.57	109.03	815.6
Non-academic prose, biography	613.97	143.72	757.69
Other published written material	569.68	152.92	722.6
Other spoken material	503.25	84.04	587.28
Newspapers	472.37	82.77	555.13
Fiction and verse	287.79	36.79	324.58
Spoken conversation	154.7	30.94	185.64
Overall	*538.89*	*116.72*	*655.61*

We see that, while *PART* is one of the most common lemmas in English, there is a lot of internal variation according to word form, mode, genre and environment (there are also some differences in frequency between text domains, gender of author/speaker, level of difficulty, etc., which will not be discussed further). The singular form *part* seems to be doing most of the work when it comes to the high lemma frequency—the plural form is only slightly more frequent in the corpus than the word *love*, for instance, and not even in

the top 300 nominal word forms in the BNC. As far as 'very frequent words' go, *parts* does not make the cut.

4.2.4 COLLOCATIONS

As has been discussed earlier, the span of 'relevant' collocations does not generally exceed four positions on either side of the node (Jones and Sinclair 1974). Sinclair also points out that two words very rarely occur together within this span in more than one or two basic patterns (1991: 121). A look at the most common collocations of PART could give us an idea of the behaviour of the individual word forms, and indicate whether or not they form the same types of clusters.

Table 6: Top 25 collocations of *part* and *parts* in the BNC, in terms of statistical significance

	… *part*…	*Occurrences*	… *parts*…	*Occurrences*
1	of	41,259	of	8,609
2	the	36,359	other	1,174
3	played	1,155	country	589
4	play	1,376	different	580
5	integral	630	the	7,776
6	as	6,619	world	537
7	in	12,546	in	3,260
8	take	1,633	various	330
9	important	1,146	spare	177
10	a	12,754	component	158
11	an	3,400	many	481
12	taking	874	two	545
13	took	875	all	735
14	plays	347	body	224
15	process	613	constituent	82
16	form	695	divided[6]	111

[6] 108 as verb, 3 as adjective

17	large	667	some	471
18	this	3,158	into	446
19	most	1,152	certain	152
20	is	5,668	those	276
21	essential	360	europe	130
22	become	537	are	751
23	major	519	most	271
24	forms	340	three	238
25	parcel	137	southern	73

Especially in the *part* column, we recognise variations of *take **part** (in)*, *play [*] **part** (in)*, and *form **part** (of)*. There are only two nouns on the list, one of which is *parcel*, which we remember from a phrase on the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* phrase list, ***part** and parcel* (cf. 4.2.2).

It is striking that there is hardly any overlap at all between these lists, and few similarities. Only the extremely frequent words *of*, *in* and *the* occur in both columns. Many of the collocations with *part* are verbs (various forms of PLAY, TAKE, FORM, BE and BECOME), but only two of the top 25 collocations of *parts* (*are* and *divided*). Both lists contain several adjectives, but no adjective occurs on both lists. Several collocates of *parts* have a plural sense (*are*, *divided (into)*, *those*, etc.), and would not have co-occurred with the singular form anyway.

The lack of overlap between the columns is an indication that *part* and *parts* have profoundly different phraseological tendencies. Judging by how many of the collocations of *part* are forms of the same verbs (with no similar tendency for *parts*), and how we instinctively recognise some of these as common phrases, it seems that the singular is particularly prone to forming semi-fixed multi-word units, especially with verbs.

We have already noted that *parts* is not in itself a particularly frequent word, and after observing that it does not seem to be part of the particularly frequent phrases that the singular is part of, I will exclude it from further discussion.

4.2.5 COLLIGATION

We observed that various verbs were frequent collocates of the singular *part*. In other words, the word class 'verbs' are frequent colligations. Table 7 ranks the top five verb lemmas occurring with *part*.

Table 7: Top 5 verb lemmas collocating with *part* in the corpus, in terms of statistical significance

	Collocate	*Total #*	*Total as collocate*	*Left*	*Right*	*In # texts*
1	PLAY	37606	3004	2495	509	1317
2	TAKE	173609	3786	3700	86	1452
3	FORM	18167	1360	1336	24	780
4	BECOME	66061	998	954	44	712
5	BE	4119746	17276	13564	3712	3037

We see that the verbs most frequently collocating with *part* have a strong tendency to appear left of the node.[7] TAKE, FORM and BECOME prefer the position immediately to the left of the node, whereas in the case of PLAY, -2 and -3 are favoured equally (cf. tables 8–11). BE occurs quite often in all positions, which is likely to be partly due to the extremely high frequency and versatility of this particular verb.

Another colligation is the word class 'preposition'—*part* regularly collocates with prepositions such as *in* and *of*.

I have decided to focus on the two lemmas at the top of the list, TAKE and PLAY, and the various realisations of their most frequently formed sequences. Both verbs occur very often with *part* in the BNC. Both, like PART, are traditionally thought of as lexical words. We recognise instinctively that both sequences can be followed by an *in*-headed

7 In the case of BE, there is a relatively high proportion of right collocation, but a closer look reveals that the favoured position is +4. Though this is within the collocation span (only just), it is not unlikely that such a common word will belong to a different syntactic and/or semantic unit than *part*. It may be so common that it is an exception to Sinclair's observation, or it may be the case that different word forms are prominent in different positions.

prepositional phrase, an element that we will be able to compare and contrast.[8] TAKE is more frequent than *part* in the corpus (1765.87 per million words), while PLAY is less frequent (382.51 p.m.w.), meaning that we will have one case of 'upward', and one case of 'downward' collocation (Sinclair 1991: 115–116). TAKE acts as a delexical verb in several constructions in English (e.g. *take a look*); PLAY does not share this behaviour. And finally, *take part [in sth.]* and *play a part [in sth.]* have closely related meanings—so much so that they share a definition in the dictionary: 'to participate'.

In the following, we will be looking at the placement of the verbs relative to *part*, and then, in the chapter 4, go on to build a lexical profile for each of these sequences in their different realisations.

POSITION OF TAKE WITH *PART*

Tables 8 and 9 demonstrate just how specifically placed TAKE is as a collocate of *part*. We see that more than 3000 sequences, or more than 82 per cent of the co-occurrences, have TAKE as the immediate left collocate of *part*.

Table 8: Positions of collocate TAKE, raw figures from the BNC

Position	*Take*	*Takes*	*Took*	*Taken*	*Taking*	*Total*
-4	33	6	28	22	17	106
-3	99	8	82	33	32	254
-2	88	8	59	37	21	213
-1	**1389**	**49**	**689**	**217**	**783**	**3127**
+1	2	1	1	2	0	6
+2	5	2	4	6	4	21
+3	6	3	3	8	1	21
+4	8	8	9	8	5	38
Total	*1630*	*85*	*875*	*333*	*863*	*3786*

[8] They stand opposed to BE/FORM/BECOME *part*, which can all be followed by *of* + [NP]

Table 9: Positions of collocate TAKE, percentages

Position	*Take*	*Takes*	*Took*	*Taken*	*Taking*	*Total*
-4	2,0 %	7,1 %	3,2 %	6,6 %	2,0 %	2,8 %
-3	6,1 %	9,4 %	9,4 %	9,9 %	3,7 %	6,7 %
-2	5,4 %	9,4 %	6,7 %	11,1 %	2,4 %	5,6 %
-1	**85,2 %**	**57,6 %**	**78,7 %**	**65,2 %**	**90,7 %**	**82,6 %**
+1	0,1 %	1,2 %	0,1 %	0,6 %	0,0 %	0,2 %
+2	0,3 %	2,4 %	0,5 %	1,8 %	0,5 %	0,6 %
+3	0,4 %	3,5 %	0,3 %	2,4 %	0,1 %	0,6 %
+4	0,5 %	9,4 %	1,0 %	2,4 %	0,6 %	1,0 %
Total	*100,0 %*	*100,0 %*	*100,0 %*	*100,0 %*	*100,0 %*	*100,0 %*

POSITIONS OF PLAY WITH *PART*

Tables 10 and 11 show, as has already been mentioned, that PLAY is concentrated around position -2 and -3 when it co-occurs with *part*; PLAY has very similar frequencies in the two positions, though the frequencies are generally lower than we saw for TAKE *part* in table 8 and 9.

Table 10: Positions of collocate PLAY, raw figures from the BNC.

Position	*Play*	*Plays*	*Played*	*Playing*	*Total*
-4	75	22	82	9	188
-3	**470**	**170**	**497**	**55**	**1192**
-2	**494**	**126**	**385**	**107**	**1112**
-1	1	0	1	1	3
+1	0	1	90	1	92
+2	222	11	48	2	283
+3	22	7	30	6	65

+4	36	3	22	8	69
Total	*1320*	*340*	*1155*	*189*	*3004*

Table 11: Positions of collocate PLAY, percentages.

Position	*Play*	*Plays*	*Played*	*Playing*	*Total*
-4	5.7 %	6.5 %	7.1 %	4.8 %	6.3 %
-3	**35.6 %**	**50.0 %**	**43.0 %**	**29.1 %**	**39.7 %**
-2	**37.4 %**	**37.1 %**	**33.3 %**	**56.6 %**	**37.0 %**
-1	0.1 %	0.0 %	0.1 %	0.5 %	0.1 %
+1	0.0 %	0.3 %	7.8 %	0.5 %	3.1 %
+2	16.8 %	3.2 %	4.2 %	1.1 %	9.4 %
+3	1.7 %	2.1 %	2.6 %	3.2 %	2.2 %
+4	2.7 %	0.9 %	1.9 %	4.2 %	2.3 %
Total	*100.0 %*	*100.0 %*	*100.0 %*	*100.0 %*	*100.0 %*

4.3 FINDINGS: TAKE *PART*

4.3.1 LEXICAL PROFILE FOR TAKE *PART* [*IN* + *]

COLLIGATION

There are very few identical recurring elements in the immediate environment of TAKE *part*; instead we have to detect some common denominators. There is a strong tendency to add *in* + [NP] directly after the sequence: 359 s-units (72 per cent) have this structure.

(5) This summer members of the team promoted the UV Ski sponsorship by demonstrating exercises in the video 'Fit to Ski' and **taking part** in a photoshoot on the glacier at Tignes. (G2W 1343)

The complement of this prepositional phrase practically always (with one exception) refers to the activity in which the subject is taking part. Instead of a noun phrase, there is very occasionally an *-ing* participle as prepositional complement.

The second most frequent right-side elements are punctuation (15.3 per cent) or a conjunction (2.5 per cent), i.e. TAKE *part* frequently occurs at the end of a clause.

(6) JOHN AMBULANCE SPONSORED EVENT: A sponsorship form will be given out with every ticket and the St. John fundraisers expect all our members to **take part**. (KAJ 633)

SEMANTIC PREFERENCE

SUBJECTS

There is a high level of superficial variation of the subjects of TAKE *part*, and, as has already been mentioned, few identical recurring strings. The phrase is widely used, and there do not seem to be many formal restrictions as to what can and cannot act as subject. There does, on the other hand, appear to be relatively strict criteria when it comes to the meaning of the subject, and what it refers to in the real world.

Table 12: Subjects of TAKE *part* in the sample

Subject type	*Instances*	*% of total 498*
Human	382	76.7 %
Human (group noun)	45	9.0 %
Institutions, organisations, businesses	38	7.6 %
Vehicle	14	2.8 %
Country, geog. nouns	13	2.6 %
Animal	3	0.6 %
Abstract	3	0.6 %
Total	*498*	*100.0%*

We observe that the verb phrase TAKE *part* primarily takes human subjects—more than 85 per cent of the sampled sequences have subjects with human referents, whether they

be referred to as individuals or groups. An explanation for this could be that the phrase has an aspect of meaning that is not (or at least less) applicable to non-human referents; intention, consciousness and willingness are prerequisites for 'taking part', whatever it is one is taking part in.

Human subjects can be singular (8) or plural (7), but are more often plural:

(7) Folkestone staff dressed up as characters from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and invited **customers** to take part in a "match the baby with the member of staff" competition. (GXA 848)

(8) **Lord Templeman** in the same year took part in radio and television programmes. (FRT 522)

There are many instances where human referents are referred to as a **group**:

(9) **An ecumenical jury** took part in the international Berlin Film Festival for the first time in February this year. (EBG 123)

In the case of the non-finite form *taking part*, we find that the **understood subject** has a human referent in all cases, whether or not this is made explicit in the sentence:

(10) Taking part in the marathon could be out of the question for many people with asthma. (CFM 176)

When we get to the **non-human subjects**, we often find that, while the realisation of the referent is not human, there are implied human actors. For example, the subjects under '**Institutions, organisations, businesses'** act very much like group nouns we have already mentioned, and the implied meaning is that some or all of the staff/persons involved are taking part in an activity on behalf of the institution. This metonymy is particularly obvious in (11), where *the school* is described as being *pleased* (the intended referents are obviously the people representing the school). In (12), we see that *the company* is described as taking part in a challenge, but two individuals are specified as doing the 'leg work' (or pedal work, as it were).

(11) **The school** was very pleased to take part in a programme which has visited many local churches and schools in Radio Merseyside's 25 years of broadcasting. (CCJ 297)

(12) **The company** recently took part in the exciting Venice Simplon Orient Express Challenge — the Paul Mitchell Systems Car, driven by Simon Le Bon and Paul Stewart, managed to beat the train and arrived in Venice before the Orient Express! (CGP 756)

We see a similar mechanism at work where we have other types of non-human subject. **Geographical names** are most often used as subject in a political/military context, where the name stands for said country's government or its army:

(13) **Britain** might take part in naval manoeuvres or keep military supplies in the region, but will refuse any request to station troops there. (ABH 1831)

Country names are in three cases shorthand for a national sports team:

(14) **ENGLAND** have accepted an invitation to take part in a Test series against the leading netball countries New Zealand and Australia in Australia next June. (A5C 504)

Vehicles act as subject 14 times, mostly in military or competitive contexts, e.g. in (15) and (16). Where the context is not a competitive one, we see that *take part* means something akin to "was involved in" or "played a part in", as in (17):

(15) A record **743 cars** took part in 1950 which meant the last car away left Brescia about 12 hours after the first! (EX1 593)[9]

(16) **72 rafts each crewed by a team of up to 10** will be taking part in the Wye race over the Bank Holiday. (K1N 3776)

(17) Mrs Jones, who is a director of the poppy factory, was speaking at a ceremony at Southampton on board Sea Princess, whose **P&O sister ship, Canberra**, took part in the Falklands conflict. (K97 3206)

[9] This is the single instance of *TAKE part in [NP]* where the prepositional phrase refers to something other than the activity in which the subject is taking part. Here, instead, the activity (an annual car race) has been referred to in previous text, thus ellipted in this sentence. The prepositional phrase instead functions as a temporal adverbial.

One sentence has a boat subject taking part in a research project. We will see later on that this is one of the recurring types of prepositional complement (though it has been ellipted in example (18)), but typically with human subjects:

(18) The scheme worked well**: four-fifths of the boats** taking part found fish in the predicted areas, good news for a country that makes 15 per cent of the total world catch. (B7C 1153)

Finally, there are 3 subjects referring to **animals**. These occur exclusively in the context of competitions or shows:

(19) Although only **pure-bred dogs** can take part in breed classes at shows, there are other opportunities for cross-breds, most notably in obedience and agility competitions. (CJE 239)

PREPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENTS: EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

The act of taking part requires an activity or event for the subject to take part in. We have already observed that the activity in question is explicitly stated within the same s-unit as the verb phrase in about 85 per cent of the sample sentences, and what 'taking part' means is largely dependent on this element, as we will discuss in more detail below. In 72 per cent of the examples, the noun phrase referring to the activity directly follows *part* as the complement of an *in*-headed prepositional phrase. No other prepositions are used to this end. The 28 per cent with atypical structures (where the *in*-phrase has been ellipted) are split down the middle between two alternatives: providing the same information elsewhere in the s-unit, as in (20), or mentioning it in previous text, (21).

(20) The offer, reported by the official ADN news agency, contained no date for **such negotiations**, nor did it specify which groups should take part. (A8J 57)

(21) Those wanting to take part **[in the seminar]** will be sent a list of all available lectures and they will be able to choose to attend four per day. (CGV 1273) (my brackets)

It becomes clear from the data that the prepositional phrase is a part of the phrasal node, but a flexible part that does not have to be realised in one particular way in order for the

meaning to be clear and unambiguous—it is the unmarked way of conveying obligatory information.

As was the case with the subjects, the number of identically recurring prepositional complements is low—the phrase appears to be very widely used. However, there is some shared semantic ground between many of the complements. The prototypical complement can be described as an 'event', or an activity relating to one. This may seem like an unsatisfactorily vague description, but upon closer inspection, we will see that it in fact refers to a large, but quite specific group of noun phrases. Some additional aspects of meaning that are very frequently present:

- The event can be pre-planned or spontaneous, but tends to be pre-planned.
- The event is organised or planned by someone other than the subject.
- The event has an intended purpose.
- The subject is one of several participants (this harks back to the original meaning of *part*—there is an implied, external 'whole'). Taking part is never a solitary pursuit.
- The subject does not usually play an especially vital role in the event, but does make a contribution of some sort, equal to that of other participants, and is never a passive onlooker.
- The subject does not usually have responsibility for anyone but herself.
- What 'taking part' entails is entirely dependent on the nature of the event. If the event is a marathon, taking part would mean running in it; if the event is a coffee evening at a church, taking part would mean socialising with other churchgoers. While the phrase on its own has a vague sense, it tends to be unambiguous in context.

While all these criteria may not all be present in all cases, they do apply to the vast majority of the data. 'Taking part' can mean everything from 'actively competing in' to 'being present at', depending on the context provided by the prepositional phrase.

Table 13: Prepositional complements of TAKE *part*

Prepositional complement	*# of instances*	*% of sample*
Events	446	89.6 %
Crimes, acts of violence	23	4.6 %
On-going processes	19	3.8 %
Groups	10	2.0 %
Total	*498*	*100.0%*

As we have already noted, 'event' is in some ways a vague-looking definition. I have categorised the 'event' complements, so as best to demonstrate both the variety and the specificity we can observe the applications of the phrase. For practical reasons, I will be using as examples the phrases where the event is made explicit within the unit. However, I have not found anything in the data to suggest that the ellipted events do not fit into the same categories, or that any particular group of events is more often ellipted than others, and have for that reason included ellipted events in table 8.

Social events: Charity events, open days, coffee evenings, sports days, ceremonies, etc.

(22) There were no half measures when Wimpey Minerals UK's Chris Chalkley agreed to take part in **a charity 'Shave-a-thon'**. (HP4 181)

(23) This can be done: — through a scheme of student self-monitoring, — through regular reports to parents and **parents' evenings** in which employers take part, — by guidance and counselling involving teachers and employers. (EVM 645)

We see how the meaning of the phrase changes according to the prepositional complement. In (22), we expect the subject to be one of the 'savers', in (23) employers attend (but do not organise) the parents' evenings.

Sports and competitive events: Competitions (also non-sporting competitions), races, marathons, relays, games, tournaments, matches, etc.

(24) This is another opportunity for someone else,' remarked the player who is the only one to have taken part in **all of Scotland's matches** this season. (K5J 3036)

(25) All the photographers taking part in **our competition** are winners in the annual Fuji Wedding & Portrait Awards, so you can be sure their work is of a high quality — as you can see from the sample here — in a variety of styles. (G2T 983)

TAKE part seems to be very frequently used about sporting events, even when the 'sport' meaning is more prominent than 'event'.

(26) On average, 60pc of the county's population took part in **sport** in 1991-92. (K97 16270)

There is also the case of **the word *activity***. Where it does act as (part of) the prepositional complement, as in (27), *TAKE part* simply means 'do' or 'perform', typically on a regular basis over a period of time.

(27) In particular, Tony Bray, who is retired, has objected to a question which asks how often the respondent has taken part in **physical activity** long enough to get 'sweaty' in the past month. (K54 1500)

Professional or educational events: Meetings, conferences, courses, seminars, workshops, etc.

(28) As a new member of Alec's staff in 1957, I was grateful to Basil and his art colleagues for welcoming me and inviting, me to take part in **their weekend courses at Woolley** on many occasions. (EVH 1279)

(29) He served on the BA's Children's bookselling committee, took part in **the meetings of the book trade's children's books committee**, and last year served as a judge for the children's book section of the Whitbread Prize. (FSV 410)

We see that the subjects in examples (28) and (29) take part by attending the event in question. They are among several other participants.

Political events: Elections, debates, discussions, decisions, schemes, congresses, demonstrations, appeals, etc.

(30) The TPLF allowed women to share land from the age of fifteen, and to take part in **elections**. (ATA 1394)

(31) Mr Major insisted that nobody was sent by the Tory Party to take part in **last year's presidential campaign** and that two Central Office staff whose trip was funded by the Republicans had gone in their own time and paid their own personal expenses. (K5D 10596)

Again, we find that what 'taking part' means depends on the prepositional complement. In (30), it means to vote. In (31), it means to campaign for the president.

Cultural events: Performances, art exhibitions, concerts, TV shows, music festivals, etc.

(32) So the first **gig** you attended was one that you were taking part in? (ED7 2765)

(33) One of the distinctive features of **'Documenta IX'** is the way we selected the 186 artists taking part. (EBS 1389)

Example (32) contrasts the verbs 'attend' and 'take part in'; it is clear that to 'attend' a gig means to be in the audience, whereas to 'take part in' a gig means to play or sing on stage. In (33), the artists take part in the exhibition by exhibiting their work, alongside other artists. Again, it is clear that they are not the audience.

A further recurring category has to do with scientific research projects. TAKE *part* seems to be very frequently used as a general term for what the objects of the study, rather than those performing it, are doing.

Research events: Experiments, trials, surveys, evaluations, assessments, polls, etc.

(34) Many of those taking part in **the poll** also believed DIY stores still 'stack it high and sell it cheap'. (G2F 24)

(35) Twelve patients, seven men aged 20–59 years (mean 38 years) and five women aged 35–63 years (mean 48 years), took part in **the study**. (HWS 1706)

The following two categories are the only two with a distinct negative theme:

Military events: Combat, clash, military action, combat, invasion, etc.

(36) And there have been unconfirmed reports that troops from Pakistan, Morocco and Tunisia refused to take part in **active combat** against Iraq. (ARW 1341)

(37) Britain might take part in **naval manoeuvres** or keep military supplies in the region, but will refuse any request to station troops there. (ABH 1831)

In the case of military actions, the subjects are often realised as geographical names, rather than individuals.

In addition to the categories subsumed under 'Events', three additional categories have been identified.

Crimes and acts of violence: Conspiracy, violence, murder, crucifixion, abduction, fraud, hostilities, humiliation, killing, attack, rape, etc.

(38) They even took over the small police station in the El Calvario district, the nearest to the main market, and executed a number of the constables who had taken part in **the massacre**. (EVS 820)

(39) […] Zhivkov's grandson Todor Slavkov had escaped prosecution after taking part in **the gang rape of a 17-year-old girl** in July 1988. (HKP 1289)

In (38) and (39), we do not find that the event necessarily fulfils the semantic criterion of being 'organised by someone other than the subject', and the same is the case with the rest of the category. The prepositional complements refer to very specific actions, a determining factor in this category. When this action is so clearly stated ('rape', 'murder', 'attack'), there is not the same need to infer an activity, as is typically the case in the other categories. This causes the meaning of TAKE *part* to shift slightly, meaning something like 'to be one of the people who did this'.

There are two small, but specific categories of prepositional complements that do not at all fit into the 'event' description.

Firstly, there is a small group of sentences where the prepositional complement refers to an **on-going process, or some sort of change** (we find process nouns like *change*, *development*, *project*, *transition*, or sometimes an *-ing* participle). In these cases, *take part in* has a meaning very similar to "be involved in", and the subject has an active part in the activity than in the above categories. The prepositional complements in this group are very similar to those we will later see are very prominent with the phrase PLAY *a part [in…],* and the meanings of the two phrases are also quite similar under these circumstances.

(40) In a surprise move on Dec. 19, the government lifted the ban on former politicians taking part in **the transition to democracy**. (HLE 587)

(41) In particular, they have no right to take part **in the running of the firm's business**, which remains firmly under the control of the continuing partners. (J6P 1155)

Finally, a small number of sentences have prepositional complements referring to a group of people serving a specific purpose, typically a group noun. In these cases, *take part* means largely the same as "be part of". They are often semantically related to professional events.

Groups: Council, committee, coalition government, etc.

(42) Gentlemen if you accept that amended recommendation it will be necessary this morning to identify those members of your committee who will take part in **this joint committee**. (KN3 352)

(43) With so many forces going there, do you think Britain is going to be taking part in **this sort of international peace-keeping force** for some time to come? (KRT 3431)

DISCOURSE PROSODY

TAKE *part* does not seem to have a particularly positive or negative prosody—it is widely used, and most of the time in value-neutral contexts (though 'taking part' at all can be seen as positive in and of itself, being active rather than passive).

Its use relating to criminal or violent acts (and military action, to an extent) is the only consistently negative group of complements, and there are no clear signs in the data that suggest there is a particular signalling element for these instances.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Our findings in this section indicate that the high frequency of TAKE *part* is most likely due to its extreme usefulness as a 'hold-all' verb for human participants in pre-organised events, or scientific research. The phrase itself has little concrete meaning, but when in context, it refers unambiguously to a specific action or set of actions known to relate to

the event specified. The actors are in most cases explicitly human, though we do find cases of metonymy, where the subject is realised as the name of a country/institution/company, but the real actors are the people associated with it. This sort of figurative language is so common in English that it hardly even registers in real text—but some meaning aspects of TAKE *part* (intention, willingness, consciousness) make it clear that the intended referent is human.

We have also found that TAKE *part* can be described as being both a 'passive' and an 'active' term—in a sense, it is always active, because the subject always fills a role, and is never completely passive (even if the subject's only task is to turn up). But the subject is not in the driver's seat either; the outcome of the situation does not hang on their participation, and they usually play an identical part (or at least identical in status) to several other participants.

4.4 FINDINGS: PLAY [*] *PART*

In contrast to TAKE *part*, this pattern has an unknown element, and there is a high level of superficial variation. I have distinguished between three types of basic node (A, B and C), according to common denominators between their formal realisations and usage. I will present each of the three categories before creating a lexical profile for each of them.

4.4.1 SURFACE VARIATION: THREE DISTINCT PHRASE TYPES

The three types have been categorised according to the nature of the determiner in the middle slot, and have been named and listed in order of frequency, as table 14 demonstrates.

Table 14: Three formal types under PLAY * *part*

Type	*# in dataset*	*% of sequences*
Type A	282	56.5%
Type B	165	33.1%
Type C	52	10.4%

Total	*499*	*100.0%*

A. PLAY [indef. det.] *part*

The first and largest category is one where the slot is filled by a grammatically indefinite element. Type A is in most cases realised as the already mentioned phrase PLAY *a part [in sth.]*. However, the open slot can also be occupied by quantifying determiners like *some*, *any*, and *no*. All (internally) negated or interrogative phrases in the sample fall into in this category.

Examples:

(44) Aroma conditioning or 'fashion' may also **play a part** in aroma preference. (B06 637)

(45) Alcohol might have **played some part** in this serious miscalculation. (CK4 988)

(46) Apparently, the guru had **played little part** in the proceedings, confining himself to putting records on the gramophone; and this, for Eliot, seemed to render him the more sinister. (H9X 217)

B. PLAY [poss.] *part*

This category contains phrases with a possessive determiner in the middle slot, i.e. phrases such as PLAY *his/its part [in…].* There is a close relationship between type A and type B, but we will discover that they are not interchangeable in use.

Examples:

(47) ILLNESS **played its part** this week in throwing up some distinctly unusual, unanticipated performances. (AJV 557)

(48) TOURISM officials yesterday paid a morale-boosting visit to hoteliers in flood-hit Llandudno yesterday and pledged that they would **play their part** in helping the town's recovery. (K3X 196)

(49) John will **play his part** shouting the lads on from the bench. (K4T 7787)

C. PLAY [def. det.] *part*

The third and smallest category contains phrases where the determiner is grammatically definite. This type is in most cases realised as PLAY *the part*, but we also find two

occurrences of the demonstrative determiner, PLAY *that part*. This type can be either literal or metaphorical, and differs greatly in meaning from type A and B.

Examples:

(50) Carl and his mother went to see a performance of Les Miserables in London, and he told her afterwards that he wanted to **play the part of Gavroche**, the young Parisian urchin. (C88 570)

(51) 1 The Artist accepts an engagement to **play the part of Receptionist** in At the Doctor's in the video entitled Grapevine II (hereinafter referred to as the Video) and during shooting to be available for stills photography. (CCU 529)

Unlike TAKE *part*, all three types of PLAY [*] *part* can also have literal meaning.

4.4.2 TYPE A: LEXICAL PROFILE

COLLOCATION

There are eight distinct realisations of type A, as illustrated by table 15.

Table 15: Frequency of slot fillers in PLAY * *part*, type A

Filler	*# of instances*	*% of category*	*% of total sample*
a	184	65.3 %	36.3 %
no	46	16.3 %	9.2 %
some	22	7.8 %	4.4 %
little	13	4.6 %	2.6 %
any[10]	9	3.2 %	1.8 %
much[11]	5	1.8 %	1.0 %
small	2	0.7%	0.4 %
another	1	0.4 %	0.2 %
Total	*282*	*100.0 %*	*56.5 %*

[10] In negated or interrogative clauses

[11] In negated clauses

COLLIGATION

The most common elements surrounding PLAY [indef. det.] *part* are very similar to those we found around TAKE *part*. 73 per cent of the phrases were followed directly by an *in*-headed prepositional phrase (for *TAKE part*, that number was 72 per cent).

(52) Two other factors seem to have **played a part** in bringing about a subtle transformation of the Arnoldian message. (C90 698)

The second most frequent right-side element is (clause-final) punctuation (18 per cent, versus TAKE's 15 per cent).

(53) No doubt Henry VIII's desire for military glory in Europe **played a part**; the payment of rewards recorded in the Household Books cease with his accession. (HWG 934)

The remaining phrases are mostly followed by non-prepositional adverbials of various kinds—none of the less frequent variations stand out as particularly frequent, or conspicuously absent.

SEMANTIC PREFERENCE

SUBJECTS

There is a very rich superficial variation among the subjects, and only a few recurring strings, but in addition to this, PLAY [indef. det.] *part* seems to take a wide variety of subject types. In contrast to TAKE *part*, neither will nor intention, nor indeed any other typically 'human' attributes, are required to PLAY *a part* [*in* sth.]. There are few, if any, obvious semantic constraints as to what can play the role of subject. We find a large number of human referents, but also physical and non-physical entities, processes, nominalised actions and abstracts are represented.

Table 16: Types of subject, type A

Subject type	*Instances*	*% of type A*	*% of total 499*
Inanimate concrete	104	32.6%	18.4%
Abstract	89	30.1%	17.0%
Human	67	21.3%	12.0%
Group	14	5.0%	2.8%
General noun (e.g. *factor*)	8	2.8%	1.6%
Total	*282*	*100.0%*	*56.5%*

Human subjects can denote individuals or groups of people. Human actors account for 21.3 per cent of the subjects of type A phrases.

(54) Though Wyatt had been against the Seven, **he** had played no part in the murder of Minister Lwo. (G04 2794)

(55) Despite the ambiguity of the statistical debate, it is clear that **advertisers** do play a part in the lives of our media. (CMB 1221)

(56) **Everyone in the Town team** played a part. (K25 1676)

We see that the phrase meaning tends to be vague—it is not clear exactly what the subject has done—but the possible meaning varies somewhat according to the nature of the subject. As opposed to TAKE *part*, where the prepositional complement was the most effective determining factor for the concrete action denoted by taking part, we already notice that the meaning of PLAY [indef. det.] *part* is affected by elements on both sides. The homogeneity of the subject types we found with TAKE *part* made this a 'non-issue' in its case.

Example (54) has a simple human referent, and it is implied that Wyatt did not perform, plan, or indeed take part in any action related to the murder. The subject in (55) is ambiguous—it can refer to advertising agencies or their employees, or even to companies that advertise via such agencies. We see that the phrase has a meaning more akin to "have an effect on". Example (56) has the context of a football match, and the phrase is

used to emphasise that no-one in the team was superfluous, but they all worked together toward the end result.

Human subjects are the only type to occur with this phrase where it has a literal, theatrical sense, but this is a very rare use:

(57) Trevor Nunn, of the Royal Shakespeare Company, is directing, and **Lloyd Webber's wife, Sarah Brightman**, will be playing no part in it. (HSG 254)

Non-human referents range from physical objects, via more or less specific, non-physical entities, to the abstract, where referents are non-quantifiable, non-physical and unobservable. There is an enormous variation, forming no obvious categories, and the choice of subject seems to be completely open, as demonstrated below (listed from most to least concrete):

(58) **Free radicals** may also play a part in producing organic compounds with metallic properties. (ALW 2220)

(59) The advent of Dutch William in 1688 may have brought a Protestant ruler, but it brought one already embroiled in war with Louis XIV, and ended a period in which **the offshore island** had played small part in the struggles of continental Europe. (HR0 1320)

(60) **Core skills** have played a part in all recent major developments in Scottish education and training, although not necessarily under that name. (HBM 705)

(61) **Relations with Tibbu** played some part in conflicts between Mannaia and Awlad Amira. (ADW 178)

(62) Clearly **memory** plays some part in many aspects of the driving task, one way to identify tasks in which memory may play an interesting role is to look at situations in which a failure of memory is observed. (HPM 94)

(63) Gastric metaplasia and H pylori infection are prerequisites, but evidence exists that mucosal production of cytokines, H pylori specific toxins and other, still **unknown factors** may all play a part in possible ulcer formation in the duodenum. (HU3 7272)

(64) **Confidence** also plays a part in maintaining safety. (B14 622)

We saw TAKE *part* causing the reader to assume, when there were non-human subject realisations, that these were shorthand for the people 'behind the scenes'. In the case of PLAY [indef. det.] *part*, this is not the case; we do not automatically assume that *the offshore island* in (64) refers to its inhabitants or governing bodies, though of course this could be the case—but this would have to be read out of the context. The PLAY-phrase has little or no say in the matter. In (63)–(69), we interpret the verb phrase quite consistently as meaning something like "be involved in the process", or "be a contributing factor", but it is never clear what the contribution consists of, or how significant it is.

There is one small, but significant category that I have separated from the rest of the non-human subjects. It contains subjects referring to a past or on-going event or action/activity. This is content that we generally tend to find realised as verb phrases, and many of the subjects in this group are nominalisations. We find nouns with suffixes like *-tion* or *-ing*, and also some instances of non-finite *-ing* participles acting as subject—we will find this sort of element to be extremely prevalent as prepositional complement, which is why I have singled them out:

(65) Whether this chairman goes along with the president or not may turn on many factors, but **bargaining** is very likely to play a part. (EAY 235)

(66) These data suggest that **calcium fluxes** play a part in the normal functioning of the rectum and colon and imply potential use in the treatment of this disease. (HU4 4183)

(67) **Careful planning and structured design** play no part in the highly-acclaimed higgle-piggle garden of Connie Franks, says Tony Lord, as he tries to uncover the secret of her success (ACY 81)

This type of subject does not appear to be reserved for any particular context or structure. Again we notice PLAY *a/no part* having a vague sense. The meaning of the type A phrase does not seem to change much according to its subject—it is, perhaps intentionally, never entirely clear to the reader what the subject has contributed. The only way the subject seems to directly affect the sense of the phrase, is that the contribution the subject makes to a situation must be within the scope of the given referent's traits and abilities (a human subject, say 'he', can 'play a part' in a something by taking conscious action; 'guilt' cannot). We find once again that the subject is not

alone in its pursuits—this seems to be what *part* brings to the semantic table, in the case of both the phrases we have investigated.

PREPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENTS

PLAY [indef. det.] *part* requires additional information about what the subject is playing a part in, in order to make sense.[12] This information tends to be found directly after *part* in an *in*-headed prepositional phrase, and we have already noted that the unmarked form, PLAY [indef. det.] *part in* [NP or *-ing* clause] makes up more than 73 per cent of the data. In the remaining examples, the prepositional phrase (or an alternative realisation) is either located elsewhere within the s-unit (13 per cent), or has been ellipted completely, due to the information already being given in the text (13 per cent). We see that the phrase in this respect behaves almost identically to TAKE *part*.

Complement types have been categorised according to formal, rather than semantic, properties. The nominalisations and non-finite *-ing* participles that we found in subject position, and as a less frequent complement type of TAKE *part*, are extremely frequent as prepositional complements with type A phrases.

Table 17: Types of prepositional complement with type A

Prepositional complement type	*instances*	*% of type A*	*% of total sample*
Simple NP	117	41.5%	23.4%
nominalisation	62	22.0%	12.4%
-ing participle	49	17.4%	9.8%
ellipsis	38	13.5%	7.6%
literal/other metaphorical meaning	10	3.5%	2.0%
other	6	2.1%	1.2%
Total	*282*	*100.0%*	*56.5%*

[12] With the exception of when the sense is literal, where this information can sometimes be optional.

The most common types of prepositional complement are simple noun phrases, nominalisations and *-ing* participles (the latter are usually followed by a noun phrase, if the verb is transitive). Simple nouns/noun phrases have few obvious common denominators. There are some recurring meanings, such as 'process', 'activity', '(scientific) field', 'event', or 'group', but many PCs adhere to different descriptions entirely, and the recurring meanings often do not have much in common. The only semantic groups that are completely absent from the complement pool are certain 'textbook nouns': physical objects and living beings (human beings, animals).

The long since conventionalised metaphor behind 'playing a part in something' places restrictions on what that 'something' is—though, given the right subject, the role/scene imagery can be applied to an extremely wide variety of situations. The internal logic of each sentence hangs on subject and prepositional complement standing in a certain relation to each other, as demonstrated in the selection below (subject underlined, PC in bold):

(68) 'Police officers may also be working in stressful conditions and stress plays a part in **back pain**,' she said. (A59 366)

(69) Sexual jealousy may play a part in **their reactions**, especially where a new partner is brought into the home before marriage. (BLW 1403)

(70) The Shah told "Moustachio" that he had avoided a bloodbath and he hoped that this would mean that one day the monarchy could again play a part in **Iranian life**. (G3R 1973)

(71) Did uncertainty play any part in **man's knowledge** before the Fall? (C8V 540)

(72) For his last three decades Clarke played no part in **science or public affairs**. (GT3 1268)

We see that there is no requirement that the PC must refer to an event that takes place in real life, like we observed with TAKE *part.* But although there are few semantic or formal restrictions, we do not have an open choice here, like we did in the subject position (though the choice of subject may be restricted by the PC in each individual case). The restrictions that apply seem to be that the complement must suit the theatrical metaphor, i.e. that it is not a single, simple, concrete unit, but something more complex, be it a process, an experience, an event or an abstract concept.

The next large group of prepositional complements has 'verb content', which I have divided into nominalisations and *-ing* participles. There is a large spectrum of nominalisations, and they, like metaphors, exist on a cline, from the conventional to the creative (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Some 'verb content' is stored in the lexicon as a parallel nominal form in its own right, such as "to decide" and "decision". These have been categorised as 'plain' nouns:

(73) […] [R]eligious affiliation plays no part in political **decisions** […]." (AD2 999)

Then we have the more or less 'marked', or creative, nominalisations, which can be utilised in order for content to fit in with a certain sentence structure (this is a common strategy in academic writing). The distinction between the 'creative' and the 'conventional' is a bit fuzzy, but there is a strong tendency in the sample at hand for the creative type to have a definite article (or sometimes a possessive determiner), and the accepted ones not to. As a secondary consequence, a sort of 'two-way street' effect means some nouns in the grey area can be read more verb-like if they have such a determiner. Compare:

(74) Television may also play a part in **education** in the future. (EW7 90)

(75) The churches need to be able to play a part in **the moral education** of people, in so far as it is possible, and one way is through schools. (CL5 330)

Example (74) presents us with *education (n)*, the name of a familiar concept and a word we use as a noun all the time. In the next example, *the moral education* sounds like more of a 'verb in noun's clothing'—the process or act of educating people. Moreover, the meaning in (75) would shift slightly if we deleted the article, towards a more general nominal sense, like in (74).

However, most nominalisations in the sample are far less ambiguous. If the nominalised verb is transitive, they have a 'tail' containing the direct object and other required elements (this is typically in an *of*-headed prepositional phrase, but, as we see in (77), other syntax is available).

(76) If the sociologist is present at the moment of speech-production, whether as observer or interviewer, then he or she plays some part **in the creation of the dialogue.** (CMS 124)

(77) The Equal Opportunities Commission was established under the 1975 Act to monitor its implementation, give advice and play a part in **its enforcement**. (AN5 1096)

(78) Older people are expected to play little part in **the running of the group**, beyond perhaps a simple process of consultation. (CE1 521)

(79) The pectoral and pelvic fins and the dorsal along the crest of the back play no part in **propulsion**. (EFR 1614)

The phrase meaning in these examples can be broadly described as 'be actively involved in' (with a human subject) or 'have an effect on' (with a non-human subject).

The second type of verb content complement is the *-ing* clause. Also here we tend to get a nominal 'tail' (when the verb is transitive), and similar to the previous structure, the writer can fit a lot of information into this clause.

(80) They are evaluated and yet play no part in **defining the criteria, determining the methods, or controlling the process.** (FAM 1256)

(81) By speaking out about envy between women, comedy can play a part **in helping us to heal it in ourselves.** (CG3 1422)

(82) The first is the animal, the bestial, which has played a part in **symbolising occult and malevolent forces throughout history**. (B1J 1853)

A very small number of examples have a *wh*-clause as PC:

(83) Misperceptions of elderly people — from seeing them as a burden and expecting them to be docile, to assuming that older people cannot be aggressive or violent — play a part **in how physical abuse is perceived**. (EA4 761)

(84) The availability of such services plays a part **in whether an old person is able to stay at home**. (CFE 1201)

The phrase meaning in (83) and (84) is more closely related to 'have a say in'. A likely explanation for this is the interrogative nature of the complement, as it presents a 'problem' rather than a situation or a (hypothetical) result.

Finally, there are the phrases with literal meaning—we did not see this with TAKE *part* at all. Literal type A phrases always have human subjects:

(85) They know that he is **playing a part**; they are amused by his attempts to amuse them; and grow fond of him; and thereby demonstrate their own tolerance to themselves; and grow even fonder of him as the occasion of the demonstration. (G0F 3279)

Every once in a while, type A phrases can be used more directly metaphorically, without taking on the standard meaning of the type A phrase. In these cases, there is never an *in-*phrase after *part*:

(86) Unemployment has also **played a part** as a recruiting sergeant for the underclass, both in the way it has selected its membership, and in the way it has held them in place. (FAF 1679)

PHRASE-INTERNAL NEGATION

There is quite a high percentage of negation/minimisation in the sample, 75 out of 282 phrases (26.6 per cent of type A, 15 per cent of total) have a non-positive particle in the free slot. I have elected not to separate these from the rest of type A, as they show the same tendencies as their positive counterparts with regard to semantic restrictions on the surrounding elements, as has been illustrated in some detail. But the high number of non-positive phrases could have implications for discourse prosody, as we will discuss later.

Table 18: Prepositional complements with negation/minimisation, type A

Prep. comp.	*# of instances*	*% of neg./min.*	*% of type A*
Noun phrase	50	66.7%	17.7%
Nominalisation	18	24%	6.4%
-ing participle	6	8%	2.1%
Ellipsis	1	1.3%	0.4%
Total	*75*	*100.0%*	*26.6%*

A few points are worth making, for instance that non-positive phrases have a much higher percentage of prepositional complements that are 'plain' nouns or noun phrases—50 out of 75 complements fall into this category. We must remember that many of the complements in the 'noun' category denote some sort of activity, process or event similar to the ones expressed through nominalisation or *-ing* participles, so this difference is not necessarily indicative of different semantic restrictions. Moreover, there are only six *-ing* complements, and only one instance of a negative phrase with an ellipted prepositional phrase; both ellipsis and *-ing* complements are significantly more frequent in positive contexts.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, TYPE A

Type A has a grammatically indefinite insert, i.e. an indefinite article or an (indefinite) quantifying determiner, and is the most common type, making up 56.5 per cent of the total sample. The phrase has very wide possibilities of application. There appear to be few semantic constraints, especially with regard to realisation of the subject. Prepositional complements very often have 'verb-like' content, which we also found (infrequently) with TAKE *part*, but these are by no means the only permitted complement types. Syntactically, this phrase accepts a greater variation on both sides of the node than we saw with TAKE *part*, where the majority of PCs were names of concrete, real-life events, and most subjects were understood to be human. PLAY [indef. det.] *part* neither requires intention, nor concreteness.

The versatility of the phrase is likely to be a contributing factor in its frequent use, especially within certain genres, e.g. academic writing. Another factor is its vagueness; 'playing a part' signifies a relationship, any relationship, between elements, people and situations, without going into detail. In contrast to TAKE *part*, the role of subject is not entirely clear to the reader, even in context. PLAY [*a*/*no*] *part* simply suggests that X has (had) something to do with Y coming about, and as a consequence, type A phrases lose their phrasal meaning once X and Y are not both present, as we saw in examples (85) and (86).

4.4.3 TYPE B: LEXICAL PROFILE

COLLOCATION

There are seven surface variants of this sequence, as illustrated by table 19.

Table 19: Frequency of slot fillers, type B

Filler	*# of instances*	*% of category*	*% of total 499*
their	65	39.4 %	13.0 %
its	50	30.3 %	10.0 %
his	17	10.3 %	3.4 %
our	16	9.7 %	3.2 %
her	8	4.8 %	1.6 %
your	8	4.8 %	1.6 %
my	1	0.6 %	0.2 %
Total	*165*	*100.0 %*	*33.1 %*

COLLIGATION

Type B tends to be part of largely similar sentence structures to type A, but type B is less often directly followed by *in* + NP or *in* + *-ing* clause; only about half the sentences have this pattern, compared to three out of four type A sentences. A further third have clause-final punctuation directly after *part*. Among the remaining sentences, we find a few recurring right-side elements we do not see with types A and C:

PLAY [poss.] *part by* [*-ing* participle]

(87) Mr Morrison and his group can play their part by **learning** for themselves the full complexity of the problem and **trying** to convey it to Irish-Americans who see Irish unity as the only answer. (K2W 931)

PLAY [poss.] *part* [infinitive phrase]

(88) The Government is playing its part **to alleviate their difficulties**. (G2K 821)

SEMANTIC PREFERENCE

SUBJECTS

Some of the type B subjects are more predictable than those of the other types, because the possessive determiner refers back to the subject —*his*, *your*, etc. refer to human beings in the corresponding number (only in the odd case of literal meaning does the determiner refer to someone other than the subject). The frequent PLAY *its part* refers to (grammatically) non-human entities, though it can in some instances refer to names of groups/institutions with implied human actors. PLAY *their part* can refer to both human and non-human actors. The subject categories overlap with those we found with type A, but there are a significantly higher number of human actors with type B, over 50 per cent.

(89) **You** will play your part in helping to preserve a distinctive beer style for future generations to enjoy. (A0A 239)
(90) **Simon; s** [*sic*] **mother** says parents must play their part, too. (K1B 2192)

Institutions, countries and organisations—where there can be implied human actors, but subject realisations are grammatically non-human—feature quite heavily:

(91) **British Gas** welcomes the opportunity to play its part and our contribution has frequently been in the form of resources. (K9S 676)
(92) **NORTHERN Ireland** played its part from start to finish in the Falklands war — and for a price. (HJ4 4647)
(93) **The Government** is playing its part to alleviate their difficulties. (G2K 821)

The added possessive element takes away some of the vagueness that was so striking with type A. When the subject referent is explicitly or indirectly human, *play one's part* takes on an aspect of duty, or responsibility, i.e. that the subject has an obligation to act in the situation. We did not see this with type A. This meaning is obviously absent where there are non-human subject referents:

(94) **The mutual support and warmth that membership of a Christian group could provide** will also have played its part. (ADC 708)

(95) **Poll rumours** continued to play their part, with a handful of 'local' pit traders taking advantage of the lunch break to turn a 13-point deficit on the Footsie into a 21-point fall by 1pm. (AHB 307)

(96) **Accidents of history, as much as of geography**, had played their part in making the village. (B0R 316)

(97) **Tea and spices** have played their part in making this unforgotten paradise a priceless jewel which has been snatched by the Portuguese, Dutch, and finally the British. (EET 1227)

The meaning of type B phrases with non-human subjects seems to be very similar to type A, though type B perhaps implies the subject having a slightly greater effect on proceedings than their type A counterpart.

Nominalisations and processes feature a few times as subject with PLAY *its/their part*, like we also saw with type A. The phrase meaning appears to be the same as with the other non-human referents:

(98) **Pollution and the removal of riverside hedges** have played their part; but above all, dredging and drainage have ironed out the varied bed conditions of gravel and silt to which the larvae of these and many other insects were so minutely adapted. (AS4 100)

(99) **Population growth on Crete** may have played its part in giving an impetus to the foundation of the colonies. (CM9 898)

PREPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENTS

Situational context is usually placed in an *in*-headed prepositional phrase, in the same way as with type A. We see that the number of sentences with the unmarked structure (i.e. phrase immediately followed by an *in*-phrase) is lower for type B, 52 per cent. We also observe this element is not always required with type B phrases:

(100) **Every little cog** plays its part. (A08 730)

Where there is no post-phrasal element, one must look at the previous text to see if there has been ellipsis, as there seems to be no clear way to tell the difference between these instances by looking at the s-unit in isolation (this will obviously not be a problem when

reading running text). Where there was ellipsis with type A, the sentence would not make sense on its own, without the ellipted information available. With type B, there are two possibilities where this happens: either the information has been ellipted, or it was never there in the first place. If the case is the latter, the phrase has a slightly different meaning.

When we discussed the syntactic environment of type B phrases, we noticed two new elements in place of the *in*-phrase: non-finite infinitive clauses, and *by*-headed prepositional phrases. The former acts much like the *in*-phrases we are used to, saying something about the context within which the subject is acting. The infinitive clause typically names the purpose of the subject's action, what the subject is trying to achieve, whereas *in*-phrases, as with type A, tend to name the process, or the circumstances and events leading up to it, as a sort of reason adjunct.

(101) AS the school summer holidays approach, the Southport Railway Centre is playing its part **to promote railway safety to the school children of the North West**. (CJ6 32)

The other recurring pattern, with the *by*-phrase, has the PC functioning as a manner adjunct, describing what it is that the subject does, rather than why he or she does it.

(102) '**Players like myself and skipper Alan McDonald** can play our part by lending our experience to the young players coming through to form the next World Cup side. (K2D 2495)

All of this indicates that the two may be different basic nodes within type B: PLAY *one's part* and PLAY *one's part in* [NP/*-ing* clause].

As with type A, there is always the possibility of a literal meaning, though this is very rare with type B. Where this is the case, the *in*-phrase is optional.

(103) In 1941, during the filming of Manpower, tension grew between Raft and co-star Edward G Robinson — they were in competition for the affections of Marlene Dietrich, besides which, Raft resented Robinson's persistent advice on how to **play his part**. (CDG 1136)

(104) But **the theremin** played its part by itself, as if it were programmed to. (ALJ 2056)

However, we must not forget that the majority of type B phrases still follow the same pattern as type A. The same types of prepositional complements are represented, but the *-ing* participle is by far the most frequent PC with type B. In (105), we see the complement followed by another PP functioning as a manner adjunct:

(105) Two cyclists are playing their part in **putting South Africa back on the sporting map**, by competing in one of the countries most exciting and challenging events. (K1G 1122)

Nouns/NPs are the second most common group. They do not seem to have different semantic restrictions as in the case of the previous type: here, too, they often refer to events and processes, but examples (106) and (107) illustrate that this is not always the case.

(106) Nottinghamshire never forgets those who have played their part **in its colourful past**. (EEG 249)
(107) When it's time for a pork dinner — and pork is practically the only source of protein for these people — the men play their part **in the pig/human relationship** and make the kill, or several kills. (G33 692)

NPs consisting of nominalisations are about as frequent as simple nouns. See the discussion of them in section 4.4.2.

(108) If the kinds of academic freedom for students just outlined are to be vigorously sustained by the academic community (as they should), then students have to play their part **in the exercise of those freedoms**. (G0R 1014)
(109) They must have played their part in **the overthrow of Thomas of Lancaster and the Lords Ordainers** at the battle of Boroughbridge on 16 March. (AE9 760)

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, TYPE B

This section has demonstrated that, while many type B phrases behave very similarly to type A, there are some crucial differences between them. We have seen that what was the most frequent structure around type A is somewhat less frequent here; only about half of type B phrases are followed by an *in*-headed prepositional phrase. Where this

structure is present, type B behaves like A with regard to which subjects and PCs it takes. Type B has a higher percentage of human subjects, and a much higher percentage of its PCs are *-ing* participles.

In contrast to type A, where context information is obligatory (usually realised as the *in-*phrase, as we have seen), this is not always required here. Type B phrases have meaning, also when there is no such additional element. Another factor distinguishing this type from the previous one is that type B can be followed by other prepositional phrases, and situational information can be presented in alternative ways, e.g. in a non-finite infinitive clause.

However, the sense of the phrase shifts when it has an *in*-phrase after it; there are, of course, cases of ellipsis, but there are also cases where this element was never there in the first place, and PLAY [poss. det.] *part* stands on its own, while still retaining full meaning. All of this indicates that there are two different basic nodes within type B: PLAY *one's part* and PLAY *one's part in* [NP/*-ing* clause]. I will be referring to the former as B1, and the latter as B2.

Type B2 bears such strong similarities to type A, both in meaning and use, that there is reason to believe that B2 is really a sub-type of type A. There is certainly a difference in meaning, as there is a possessive element in type B that adds an additional aspect, but the difference is no more than the sum of its parts, so to speak. There is a similar difference between PLAY *a part* and PLAY *some part*; the difference hangs on the inserted element, but the meaning is transparent within the phrase, in the sense that one will be able to use PLAY *some part* if you are already familiar with PLAY *a part*. The possessive meaning is also weakened once there is an *in*-phrase present, so much so that the type B sequence becomes almost interchangeable with type A:

(110) On the other hand, it is inevitable that a property which, while still **playing its part** in entity-identification, needs to be explicitly assigned will nearly always be a more peripheral or unusual or occasional one. (HPY 434)

(111) ALTON Lions are to **play their part** in a worldwide campaign to help diabetics — they are offering a screening test at this year's Alton Carnival. (B03 1329)

B1 has a meaning akin to "to do one's bit", "to pull one's weight", "to do what/as much as is expected of you". This phrase assumes that the subject has either an allotted task, or

is expected to contribute a certain amount in a situation. What the contribution consists of can sometimes be made explicit in a *by*-headed PP, as we saw in (87) and (102). To *play one's part*, where there is a human subject, is also something one can be asked to do. It is a conscious act that requires a degree of willingness and intention, in the same way as TAKE *part* does. Human subjects (or implied subject referents) are overrepresented with this type of phrase, but there are some non-human subjects, like (100), where *every little cog plays its part*.

4.4.4 TYPE C: LEXICAL PROFILE

COLLOCATION: SURFACE VARIATION

Type C (PLAY [def. det.] *part*) presents far less formal variation than the previous types; the phrase has only two realisations in the sample data.

Table 20: Frequency of slot fillers, type C

Filler	*# of instances*	*% of category*	*% of total 499*
the	50	96.2 %	10.0 %
that	2	3.8 %	0.4 %
Total	*52*	*100.0 %*	*10.4 %*

COLLIGATION

This is the only one of the types that does not have the *in* + [NP/*-ing* participle] that has been predominant until now. Instead, the structure that we find in 70 per cent of the sentences, is:

PLAY [def. det.] *part of* [NP]

The NP is the name/title of the role being played, and can be a proper noun, or a definite or indefinite common noun.

(112) If they're on the long tour at this point, the commentator is pushed aside by the man playing the part **of the cook**. (JTE 287)

(113) Miss Perrie has played the part **of Ivy Brennan** in the top-rated series for 17 years. (K3E 59)

In the other 30 per cent, there is no prepositional phrase because *the* or *that* have anaphoric reference. This can occur anywhere in the sentence.

We also see that, in contrast to types A and B, type C can be modified by an adverbial manner adjunct in the form of an adverb.

(114) He had played that part **well**, certainly at least as well as the actor who was to take over from him. (H92 15)
(115) All I know is he's signed a contract to play the part **properly**, and at the moment he's not doing it. (H92 579)

All of the above indicates that the type C phrase is completely different in meaning and function than the previous types.

SEMANTIC PREFERENCE

There are two distinct, but related meanings of the type C phrase. One is literal, usually referring to an actor. The subject plays a role, be it in a play, a film, a computer game, or a piece of music.

The other sense I will call social-metaphorical. A social situation is described as if it were, indeed, a scene in a play, and the subject described as taking on a social 'role' or obligation. There do not appear to be any indicators as to whether the phrase is used in its literal sense or not; the two senses appear in the same structures.

SUBJECTS

Type C has almost exclusively human subjects, regardless of whether the phrase meaning is literal or social-metaphorical. Both senses require there to be a situation with human participants—someone who is able to, indeed, *play the part*.

(116) **She** to play the part this time of chaperon to her own servant? (CCD 625)
(117) It went to Geoffrey's head that he'd been cast as Mullins, the pirate. **Somebody very distinguished** had played the part in the last London production. (FNU 950–1)

Only twice does a non-human subject occur, and in both examples, the phrase has a literal sense.

(118) **Which preserved locomotive** played the part of the Titfield Thunderbolt? (HHU 239)

The context here is a film—where the phrase meaning is literal, personification can be used to have a non-human referent as subject. No similar phenomenon can be seen in any of the social-metaphorical type C phrases.

PREPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENT

Type C phrases have a grammatically definite middle element, separating them from the previous types. We have seen that almost 70 per cent of type C has an *of*-headed prepositional phrase directly following *part*. This *of*-unit is part of the noun phrase; it only modifies *the part*, not PLAY.

(119) The Führer was no longer present among his people; he played the part increasingly **of a deus ex machina**, turning up every now and then in Berlin or Munich […]. (ADD 305)

(120) Is it true that before singing in Suede, Brett played the part **of Jill in Eastenders**? (CK5 3468)

Occasionally, *the part* is specified in other ways:

(121) […] how to deal with women who, by 'failing' to **play the part expected of them** (i.e. by ending their marriages or by having a child without ever having been married) find themselves without the support of a man. (ECB 901)

Where there is no such specification, *the part* has been mentioned in the previous co-text, and has anaphoric reference.

(122) Babs Osborne was too tall for the part, and besides the woman had **played the part** before, the time P.L. O'Hara had appeared as Captain Hook. (FNU 811)

In the two cases of PLAY *that part*, *that* also has anaphoric reference, again not requiring further description.

(123) The man who **played that part** was Norman Lumsden, and I bumped into him when he was in Belfast last Friday to present the awards at an Action MS reception, sponsored by British Telecom. (K2M 42)

There were no occurrences in the sample of 'play the part' in the sense "make a show of".

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, TYPE C

All findings indicate that type C is a semantically transparent, analysable phrase, consisting of an independent lexical verb PLAY and a noun phrase. We have found the phrase meaning to be mostly literal, in which case the subjects are either human, or occasionally personified, non-human physical entities. The figurative (social-metaphorical) use takes exclusively human subjects; moreover, it appears to have a negative prosody, which the literal use does not.

4.4.5 DISCOURSE PROSODY

TYPE A AND B2

Despite the striking amount of negation we saw with type A, the phrase does not generally have identifiable negative prosody. In most cases, the phrase does not seem to indicate any particular speaker attitude, though the vagueness of meaning that we have already commented on may in some cases reflect uncertainty or reservation on the part of the speaker. This is particularly the case of the variant PLAY *some part*, where the speaker does not seem to fully recognise any significant contribution from the subject.

On the other hand, type B2 does seem to be positively charged in many cases, as the possessive element acknowledges the role of the subject in a way that type A does not. There is, as has already been discussed, more of a 'duty' connotation with this phrase, sometimes reflecting the completion of a task.

TYPE B1

Type B1 comes with more of a reflection of speaker attitude than B2, though this attitude is seldom positive. The situation is often that the subject has done his or her bit, thus not

feeling like he or she should have to do more—this is not directly negative, perhaps, but does not reflect an engaged attitude after the task has been completed. Otherwise, B1 can be used when the speaker is discussing someone who has not or does not realise that he should pull his weight. This node has clear connotations of responsibility, often new or unwanted; something the subject is being requested to do—B1 is often found in clauses such as this:

(124) God wants to help you do that, but you must **play your part**. (C8N 1160)

However, this prosody does not appear to affect sentences with a non-human subject.

TYPE C

The literal sense of type C appears to have a plainly descriptive function, and has no distinct positive or negative prosody. However, by isolating the social-metaphorical sense, we see a possible pattern of negative prosody emerging.

(125) His sordid affairs were none of her concern provided she wasn't being asked to **play the part of catalyst**. (HA5 1533)

(126) 'Even a blind man could see that I hold all the cards in this situation,' he told her flatly as she trailed slowly and miserably into the room behind him. 'So I suggest that you start concentrating on **playing the part of a loving and dutiful wife**.' (JXX 1398–9)

The negativity does not seem to depend on the nature of the 'part' being played, but on the context. The phrase is typically used where the subject is asked or expected, sometimes against their will, to play a certain part, often as a result of an unfortunate or unexpected sequence of events. Most, though not all, of the examples of the social-metaphorical use see the subject performing his or her task with a degree of resentment. We saw in the case of type A that 'playing a part in something' does not automatically mean that the subject has done so willingly or intentionally, and the same aspect of meaning emerges in type C.

It is, however, important to remember that this is the least common sense of the least frequent type in the 500-strong dataset. No firm conclusions can be drawn on the basis of 15 examples.

4.5 FINDINGS: PLAY [*] [*] *PART*

4.5.1 SURFACE VARIATION

In theory, two open slots should open up for greater (superficial) variation than one. Surprisingly, this sequence in fact presents far less variation than PLAY [*] *part*. The first open slot is in most cases filled by the indefinite article (*a* or *an*), and the second is in most cases occupied by an adjective.

I will be referring to the open slots like this: PLAY [S1] [S2] *part*.

Table 21: Elements appearing in slot 1 (-2 position to *part*)

S1	*# of instances*	*% of total 494*
a / an	441	89.3 %
Possessive det.	18	3.6 %
No, little, any	15	3.0 %
the	9	1.8 %
Adv.	7	1.4 %
Such	2	0.4 %
Some	2	0.4 %
Total	*494*	*100.0 %*

Table 22: Elements appearing in slot 2 (-1 position to *part*)

S2	*# of instances*	*% of total 494*
Adjective	488	98.8 %
No	3	0.6 %
a	3	0.6 %
Total	*494*	*100.0 %*

As we see from tables 14 and 15, there are a few elements that stand out as extremely frequent, and a small selection of others occurring from time to time. We see that each slot has one clearly preferred choice. The vast majority (441, or near 90 per cent) of phrases forming this sequence look like this:

PLAY [*a/an*] [adj.] *part*

This looks very much like an expansion of the type A phrase from the previous section, with an added modifier before the noun.

Looking at the remaining 53 phrases, all the basic patterns we found in section 4.4 appear to be represented in expanded form, but only in very small numbers.

PLAY [neg./min.] [adj.] *part*

PLAY [adv.] [neg./min.] *part*

PLAY [poss.] [adj.] *part*

PLAY *the* [adj.] *part*

Finally, there are two counts of the following structure:

PLAY such a part

4.5.2 PLAY A/AN [ADJ.] PART

The double-slot sequence is marginally more frequent than the single-slot construction—1192 occurrences in the British National Corpus (BNC) vs. 1112. A closer look at the double slot sequence has shown that an extremely high proportion of these that resemble an expanded version of type A from section 4.4. A quick search in the BNC reveals that the expanded version is more than twice as frequent as its basic counterpart:

PLAY *a part*: 457 hits

PLAY [*a|an*] [adj.] *part*: 1047 hits

This striking difference in frequency forces us to re-evaluate which of these it is that is the unmarked phrase—could the PLAY *a part* be the marked version of PLAY [*a/an*] [adj.] *part*? Or could they be two different nodes entirely? This will be one of the main focal points of the discussion to come.

ADJECTIVES

The eleven most frequent adjectives in S2 make up more than 77 per cent of the phrases in this pattern. 47 less frequent adjectives make up the final 23 per cent.

Table 23: Adjectives occurring more than 10 times in S2, where S1 is an indefinite determiner

Adjective in S2	*# of instances*	*% of sequence*	*Cumulative % of sequence*
Important	114	25.9%	25.9%
Major	53	12.0%	37.9%
Significant	36	8.2 %	46.0%
Large	32	7.3 %	53.3%
Big	22	5.0 %	58.3%
Prominent	19	4.3 %	62.6%
Active	16	3.6 %	66.2%
Full	14	3.2 %	69.4%
Crucial	12	2.7 %	72.1%
Leading	11	2.5 %	74.6%
Vital	11	2.5 %	77.1%
Total	*340*	*77.1 %*	*77.1%*

We see that the most frequently recurring adjectives have a lot in common semantically; they emphasise the importance of the part being played, but do not add new information about it (the same is typical of most of the less common adjectives). Information-adding adjectives occur a few times, as do adjectives minimising, rather than emphasising, the noun. I consider the minimising adjectives to be a subset of the emphasising category, as they too say something about the *degree,* rather than the *nature,* of the part. The adjectives have been divided into two categories: 'degree adjectives' and 'descriptive adjectives'.

Table 24: Adjective types in S2, in pattern PLAY [*a*|*an*] [adj.] *part*

Category	*Types*	*Tokens*	*% of total types*	*% of total tokens*
Degree	51	434	87.9%	98.4%
Descriptive	7	7	12.1 %	1.6%
Total	*58*	*441*	*100.0%*	*100.0%*

Degree adjectives:

(127) Actuaries continue to **play an active part** in consultations on the disclosure of information during the sale of life assurance products. (HBV 46)

(128) What we have inherited will **play an important part** in our dealings with others, at least as important as the actual experiences we have been through. (CGE 839)

(129) This is not to say that you should never eat these things but that ultimately they should **play a minimal part** in your day-to-day eating. (AD0 1466)

Descriptive adjectives:

(130) Cognitive disturbances may **play a predisposing part** and may also maintain the disorder once it has been initiated. (HWW 739)

(131) Acting as Geoffrey's spiritual adviser, she **played an indirect part** in the church's struggle with King Stephen between 1139 and 1141. (GT4 1229)

We see that degree adjectives make up more than 98 per cent, and that the type/token ratio is relatively low among them (0.118). There is a clearly reserved choice of preferred adjectives for S2 in this construction, from those so common they almost form a sort of semi-fixed expression (e.g. *important*, occurring 114 times) to those that are acceptable based on an aspect of their semantic content (e.g. *notable*, occurring once).

This leaves us with the descriptive adjectives. This highly marked choice goes against what we observed in section 4.4.2, where we described PLAY [indef. det.] *part* as a conveniently vague way of presenting a relationship between an element and a whole.

It is interesting to note that, in the few cases where the adjective is purely descriptive (some are in a grey area where they speak to both the degree and nature of *part*), the phrase has a literal sense:

(132) When asked if she'd be prepared to tone down her good looks to **play an unattractive part**, she says:' Sure! (HSJ 786)

(133) Drama as soap star **plays an arresting part** (K97 44)[13]

This strengthens the argument that the word in S2 is selected through the idiom principle. Looking at PLAY *the part*, we saw that the definiteness of the insert brought the phrase back to a literal sense. The same may be the case here; when a specific, descriptive element added to the phrase, this changes the meaning and use of it entirely.

SEMANTIC PREFERENCE

SUBJECTS

A great variety of subjects are represented with this pattern, as with its single-slot counterpart. From nominalisations to human referents and abstract concepts; there do not seem to be any particular semantic restrictions when it comes to the subject. The distribution of each type is similar to our findings from the single-slot phrase, but we see a higher proportion of 'verb content' (nominalisations or *-ing* participles) acting as subject.

(134) Welcome back: **Tactical voting** is expected to play a major part in the general election, as Labour and the Liberal Democrats try to oust the Conservatives in marginal seats. (K1J 2437)

The most frequent subject types have referents that are human (individuals or groups) or concrete and non-human. Some also refer to processes and events, which we remember were very common as prepositional complements with type A and B of the single-slot sequence.

[13] Newspaper headline, play on words about an actor making a citizen's arrest.

(135) **The artist** must play an integral part in the process from the beginning. (APX 688)

(136) **These procedures** played a central part in the construction of the new English. (EWR 61)

(137) Seen in this way, it is clear that **fairy tales** play a significant part in helping us grow up […]. (CG3 1306)

PREPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENTS

The sequence PLAY [*] [*] *part* is followed directly by *in* + [NP/*-ing* participle] in more than 80 per cent of cases. An element of situational context is required, as with type A and B2 of the previous sequence, and the options for its grammatical realisation are very similar.

(138) Body position and movement also play an important part — although the fact that turns latch on to each other successfully in telephone conversations seems to suggest that these factors, like gaze, are perhaps not as important as might at first appear. (F9W 1139)

Example (138) is from a text about the linguistic phenomenon of turn-taking, where the situational context has been clearly established in previous text, and the actual *in*-phrase has been ellipted.

Again we find that there is a relatively high proportion of alternatively phrased verb content as a complement of *in*. 116 of the complements are *-ing* participles:

(139) It is common ground that discrimination training will establish associative links that play an important part in **generating** the changes in behaviour that are observed. (APH 1035)

Nominalisations and process nouns are also typical PCs:

(140) The fortunes made out of slavery and the allied triangular trade in sugar, tobacco, cotton and other commodities produced in the Caribbean islands and America also played an important part **in British economic development**. (CLW 681)

(141) But there was one mechanism which Keynes neglected to include in his list of the effects of wage-price deflation and which was to play an important part in **the revival of the classical belief in the inherent tendency towards a state of full employment.** (J0U 110)

(142) In the preliminary stages of analysis, dramatic methods can therefore play a central part in **hypothesis-generation**. (CMS 129)

(143) The rogue p53 gene was also thought to play a large part in **lung, stomach and bowel cancer**. (AKF 14)

On the whole, both subjects and prepositional complements with this sequence fit very well with our findings from PLAY [indef. det.] *part*.

The very rare phrases PLAY *such a part* and PLAY *only a part* can also be seen as variations on the type A phrase, but there are too few occurrences (three in total) to draw any firm conclusions.

4.5.3 OTHER SEQUENCES

PLAY [POSS.] [ADJ.] *PART*

This recurring sequence resembles an expanded type B structure, with a possessive determiner in S1, and an adjective in S2. This is the second most frequent pattern, occurring 18 times. The adjectives are mostly degree adjectives, with *full* recurring all of 12 times.

(144) We will **play our full part** in the discussions of the monetary institutions Europe may create in the 1990s. (AM8 366)

(145) And he urged Prime Minister John Major to ensure Britain **played its full part.** (CH6 2856)

Four adjectives in the set are descriptive, and again we see that the phrase shifts towards literalness when these are inserted:

(146) But who cares when you're waiting to **play your greatest part** … as a mum. (CH6 8220)

The distinctions between the literal and the metaphorical, and metaphorical and phrasal, are somewhat less clear in this category. To *play one's full part* is similar in meaning to type B2 from 4.4.3, but PLAY [poss.] *own part* (occurring twice) is different sort of phrase entirely. Finally, *[the town] played its distinguished part [in the expulsion of the Habsburgs]*, a highly marked turn of phrase, chosen for dramatic effect.

PLAY THE [ADJ.] PART

This looks like an expanded version of the type C phrase from 3.5, and only occurs nine times in the dataset, and some of the adjectives in S2 are similar to those in the indefinite version of the phrase: only two of the adjectives are descriptive (147), while seven are degree adjectives. We see that where the adjective is descriptive, the phrase retains its literal meaning, like we saw in the case of PLAY *the part*. However, where there is a degree adjective, the phrase resembles the indefinite two-slot phrase more than its own shorter counterpart.

(147) And perhaps this also explains why he was so keen to **play the leading part** as villainous Michael Murray in GBH. (GB8 1987)[14]

(148) But that didn't stop him from noting that chance **played the biggest part** in the suburb's rich visual appeal. (K4P 2346)

We can therefore reject the assumption that PLAY *the* [adj.] *part* is simply an expansion of PLAY *the part*. The meaning of the phrase depends on external factors as well as form, and is not fixed, but varies according to the nature of the adjective in S2.

4.5.4 NEGATION, MINIMISATION AND DOUBLE NEGATIVES WITHIN THE PHRASE

There is one phrase type we have not yet touched upon in this double-slotted category: and the phrases that are negated or express a 'minimising' meaning. 29 instances of this occur.

[14] The phrase *PLAY a leading part* occurs 11 times in the dataset, but in this case *leading part* means 'the lead', the starring role.

We already touched upon phrase-internal negation and minimisation in one of the previous sections, as one possible way of expressing negative meaning is through 'type A expansion', with the PLAY *a/an* [neg./min.] *part* structure.

We recall that type A not only included PLAY *a part*, but also other inserts, such as *some, any, little* and *no.* These phrases can also be expanded to express negative/minimised meaning in the two-slot sequence:

(149) Although the priest **played no essential part** in the contract, he was increasingly present. (HPW 1848)
(150) […] [G]overnment financial assistance to strikers may **play some minor part**, not so much in starting, but in prolonging a strike[…]. (FR4 1345)

Another possibility for expressing negative meaning is to add an adverb in S1 before a negative in S2. This structure occurs seven times.

(151) Attitudes of this kind meant that purely dynastic considerations **played strikingly little part** in the thinking of most of these rulers. (H8C 410)
(152) As works or good deeds **played absolutely no part** in this process, the elect were assured that they could never fall from grace, and derived great comfort from this 'assurance'. (CLM 206)

In addition to the 'true negation' above, there are five instances of the double negative PLAY *no small part*, and a few other varieties of negative structures being used to express positive meaning.

(153) You couldn't blame Dr Eban, who **played no small part** in his country's survival with his jet-setting diplomacy, for sounding a touch smug. (AJN 438)
(154) It is hoped that this work may **play some small part** in redressing this imbalance. (ECD 182)

4.5.1 DISCOURSE PROSODY

The sequence PLAY [indef. art.] [adj.] *part* has a positive prosody, clearly signalled both by the adjective type so often found in S2 (*important, vital, major*, etc.) and by the generally positive contexts of utterance. There are hardly any occurrences of a subject

playing a vital part in something that is not a positive process, development or achievement. However, the phrase itself is frequently the only positive element in and otherwise not overtly value-laden context. Words like *important* and *vital* emphasise the significance of the achievement, often more so than the co-text.

The other realisations are not numerous enough to draw very firm conclusions, but the expanded type B1 and B2 phrases appear to have retained much the same prosody as their shorter counterparts. Also here, the degree element makes the prosody even more distinct.

The type C expansion, which we observed was either literal, or closer to the expanded type A in meaning, also appears to inherit type A prosody.

4.5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The sequence PLAY [*] [*] *part* has proven to be a strikingly homogenous sequence—although there is a lot of surface variation in terms of how many different realisations there are, most of the variants are very infrequent. 89 per cent of the sample consists of a single pattern: PLAY [*a*/*an*] [adj.] *part*. This pattern shares most of the qualities of the type A phrase from the previous section, but has a distinctly positive prosody. It is also significantly more common than the original type A phrase, something that raises questions about the true prosody of the shorter variant: is PLAY [indef. det.] *part* less positive than previously assumed? Has perhaps not type A been expanded, but the double-slotted sequence been shortened, in order to allow for statements that are intentionally less enthusiastic about the role of the subject? The evidence suggests that the answer to these questions is a tentative 'yes'. Further study is recommended before we can put these questions to rest.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The primary motivation for this study has been to investigate the phraseology of a very common word in light of John Sinclair's work on extended lexical units and co-selection in language. The very frequent noun PART has a rich and complex phraseology in English, and the singular form *part* has a particularly strong tendency to co-occur with a small number of verbs. This study has been an investigation into the high-frequency sequences TAKE *part*, PLAY [*] *part*, and PLAY [*] [*] *part*. The aim was to find out more about the role of *part* in these sequences, and how meaning is created through a complex co-selection process, rather than by simply combining the meanings of individual words.

Corpus data and methodology are especially suited for this type of usage-based enquiry. The study is based on material from the British National Corpus (BNC), from which 500 occurrences of each sequence were extracted for lexical profiling and in-depth analysis.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

PLAY [*] *part* was found to have a high level of surface variation, and the realisations were grouped into three basic types/nodes with distinct meanings and uses. The least frequent type, PLAY [*the*/*that*] *part*, was not found to be phrasal.

PLAY [*] [*] *part* presented much less variation than its single-slot counterpart, with the construction PLAY [*a*/*an*] [adj.] *part* (type A expansion) making up almost 90 per cent of the sample.

TAKE *part* is the only sequence with no unknown elements, only realised as a single node.

All phrases experienced more consistency of patterning to the right of the node than to the left, and the same patterning recurred throughout the analysis. All phrases except PLAY [*the*/*that*] *part* were usually followed by an *in*-headed prepositional phrase containing situational information in the complement. This information is obligatory in almost all cases, but can sometimes be realised as something other than an *in*-phrase. It is

not obligatory with PLAY [poss. det.] *part*, but the phrase meaning shifts when there is no *in*-phrase, and it is likely that PLAY [poss. det.] *part* and PLAY [poss. det.] *part in* [NP/*-ing* participle] are two different nodes.

TAKE *part* almost exclusively occurs with subjects that have human referents, even when these are not explicit. Obligatory situational context, typically realised as an *in*-headed prepositional phrase, usually denotes some sort of 'event', though it can in rare cases denote a group of people or a violent act. This situational context gives a specific meaning to the verb phrase, though the phrase in itself carries very little meaning, and its constituent parts even less. This results in TAKE *part* being used as something of a 'catch-all' phrase for participation in any pre-organised event, where the subject does not play a particularly vital role, but makes an expected contribution as one of many actors.

The two phrasal types of PLAY [*] *part* colligate with largely the same elements as TAKE *part*, but they do not place the same restrictions on either subject or prepositional complement. Prepositional complements can be noun phrases or *-ing* clauses, and noun phrases are often nominalisations, meaning that most PCs with PLAY [indef. det./ poss. det.] *part* have a 'verb-like' sense, even when they are not actually verbs. However, although this is the most frequent use of the phrase, every type of referent can be found as PC, with the exception of concrete physical objects and living beings.

In contrast to TAKE *part*, PLAY [*] *part* keeps a relatively vague meaning, even in context, which seems to be one of the reasons for its high frequency. The phrase is used to symbolise a relationship between a contributor and some sort of 'whole', be it a process, a goal or a situation. The primary restrictions that seem to be placed on subject and PC with these phrases is that they must share a relationship that works within the frame of the fundamentally theatrical metaphor of 'playing a part'. All subject types are represented, but not all subject types can occur with all PCs.

PLAY [*] [*] *part* exemplifies the underutilisation of grammatical options discussed in chapter 2. An overwhelming majority of this sample fits into the following pattern: PLAY [*a/an*] [degree adj.] *part*. This pattern closely resembles type A of the single-slot phrase, and is used in much the same way. Additionally, the above pattern is more than twice as frequent in the corpus as its shorter counterpart, and has a much more positive prosody. The remaining realisations of PLAY [*] [*] *part* tend to look like expansions of the other two types of PLAY [*] *part*, but a closer look reveals that they too are used a lot

like type A, suggesting that this is the only type that allows for a lot of flexibility and variation, while keeping its phrasal and figurative meaning. This flexibility might also be because of the stability of the underlying imagery. We also remember that PLAY is a less frequent word than *part*, and may have a somewhat predictive function when it stands to the left of *part*, so that more variation is permitted without the phrase meaning weakening.

In all the phrases with PLAY, *part* retains more of its meaning than in TAKE *part*, though there is certainly an aspect of *part*'s meaning in all the phrases, in that the subject never acts alone. With TAKE *part*, the subject is one of many equal, non-essential contributors, whereas PLAY-phrases usually have subjects that have made a significant, often behind-the-scenes contribution to the situation. However, this aspect of meaning seems to have transferred from the word to the phrase, and from the phrase to its use, where it dictates the choices or co-selection of subject and prepositional complement/situational context. This is particularly true of TAKE *part*, where we found that the choice of both subject and PC followed very clear patterns, meaning that very little 'work' has to be done by the verb phrase itself.

5.3 AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The limited scope of this study leaves room for further research into the phraseology of PART and its function in recurring phrases, and also further study of the phrases that have been studied in this thesis.

With regard to the phrases we have studied, it would be interesting to look more closely at their flexibility, particularly of the grammatically ill-formed TAKE *part*. One could also investigate the unexplored variations of phrases with PLAY and *part*, as these seem to be open to a lot of variation—but how much? And does the positive prosody continue to increase further according to number of inserted words? Studies such as this could be useful as a contribution to ESL/EFL research. One could also do the opposite, and look at how learners of English use these phrases—if the figurativeness of PLAY [*] *part* is easier to understand than the more opaque TAKE *part*.

Another option would be to investigate the use of PLAY [*] *part* and its various realisations in different text types. We remember from section 4.2 that *part* was very frequent in academic prose, and though it was beyond the scope of this investigation,

there were strikingly many examples from academic text. The high number of nominalisations occurring with the phrase is also a well-known trait of scientific language. Is the phrasal meaning, which I have described as 'conveniently vague', exploited in academic texts? A study of the relationships in academic writing between subject and prepositional complement with PLAY-phrases could provide some interesting insights into the genre.

5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings from this study add further support for Sinclair's theories of language production and extended units of meaning. In the same way as *way*, *part* is a very frequent word that is used in a number of high-frequency phrases. In the phrases we have investigated, there is evidence of a substantial semantic weakening of the word *part*. Instead we detect meaning that is inseparable from the phrase and its co-selected elements.

As with all usage-based phraseological research, this study serves as a contribution to the body of knowledge that could, in the future, change the way we learn, teach and talk about language.

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